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SEYMOUR HICKS:

TWENTY-FOUR YEARS OF AN ACTOR'S LIFE

BY HIMSELF Hicks

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NEW YORK
JOHN LANE COMPANY
MCMXI

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DEDICATION

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

To that half of my profession who think I can't act, and

To the other half—who *I* am certain can't.

To my enemies who say nice things of me.

To my friends who never do.

To those many critics who know nothing and think I'm excellent.

To the few who know anything and think I'm not.

To the Patrons of the Drama who never pay.

To the one man who laughed at me and is now under lock and key.

To the brave man who has parted with his money for this book, and

To those who would always help me if I was never in distress.

"Early to bed and early to rise,
Ain't a bit of good unless you advertise."

INTRODUCTION

WHEN a man sits down to write a book about himself, generally he does so from one of four reasons: sheer impertinence; a lack of humour; the hope of advertisement; or because he knows that while writing little about himself it gives him an opportunity to say a great deal about other people. I frankly plead guilty to the last two; and having gone thus far on the road of truth, let me push on yet another milestone.

You know my face, no doubt. I am not extraordinarily proud of it. Is it possible that I know yours? How often, I wonder, have you paid good money to see me make a fool of myself? How often have I seen you do the same thing in the stalls for nothing! Perhaps we have never met, pictorially or otherwise; well, whether we have or not, Seymour Hicks is now yours for two-and-six; but in surrendering myself to you, you must not imagine I am going to lay bare a great soul for thirty copper tokens. As I have been working for twenty-four years, that would only work out at a little over a penny a year, and artist though I be, I know that the commercial value of the body I am condemned to drag through musical comedy after musical comedy (the titles alone of which differ) is worth more than this.

But I do want to interest you; and I feel that even if my story is not an epoch-making one and does little good, it will certainly do no harm, as a well-known actor remarked when he was met by his friends, riding on a half-a-crown-an-hour horse through the streets of Manchester on a Monday afternoon, having hired two little boys to point at him at intervals, and in audible asides say: "Look! if that ain't Mr. Burns who opens to-night at the Theatre Royal!"

Not being gifted with the pen of a Gissing, or the introspective descriptive powers of a Ryecroft, I will endeavour in all cases to come to "my horses" as quickly as possible and without too much over-elaboration, as Samuel Phelps was never tired of advising the youth of his day to do. For a long time I have pondered of what I could write that might serve as lyric to the music of a railway train—or haply save you buying a bromide at the nearest chemist's. Anecdotes of others perhaps? Misfortunes to myself? For have not the misfortunes of others always been greeted with a smile of satisfaction from an assembled and uninvolved multitude, even from the day when that Jewish humorist Noah christened his one son Ham so as to give the other brothers a lifelong laugh? But there, I don't even know if Noah was a Jew—perhaps he wasn't, as we don't hear of him living in the West End of any particular city. All I know about him is that he had a yacht which he used instead of the then uninvented umbrella.

Misfortunes to myself or anecdotes of others or not-I have determined that these pages shall be covered with

ncidents connected with the many interesting people have known—and I hope I shall not be found pushing nyself too much in the foreground of what follows. The iterary merits of these pages are *nil*. The great art of vriting I unhappily do not possess, but if I succeed in vhiling away an odd hour for you, my object will have been achieved, and I beg you look upon this brilliant ittle *pousse-café* of other people's witticisms with a kindly nd indulgent eye.

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SEYMOUR HICKS

CHAPTER I

BIRTH, BOTTLES AND BUSKINS

1871.

Hicks.—On the 30th inst., at La Fontaine, St. Heliers, Jersey, the wife of Capt. E. P. Hicks, of the 42nd Highlanders, The Black Watch, of a son.

THIS was the first notice of myself ever written—!!!

Mother and child did well.

It is customary, I believe, to begin a narrative of this ind with a description of one's parents, one's brothers, nd all the members of a very ordinary household. his I conceive to be the greatest mistake; for if one's ather had been of interest to anyone but his immediate ircle, he himself would surely have been written about. nd of one's brothers, well, I am pleased to say I have wo, and that we are all horribly alike . . . let us leave iem at that. Who cares that my grandfather had o many medals that he was obliged to hang his odd .C. on the back of his neck; that my male parent as the only English officer in the 42nd Highlanders or nearly a quarter of a century; that I am more than ree-quarters an Irishman; or that I took my mother's

maiden name as my Christian name? All these things are very tender to me, and they, with many others less sacred, are locked away in a little box labelled "Memories," to be peeped at only when there is no one else by. And this is as it should be. Of course, were I a genius, which I thank heaven I am not—or soap and I would only have been on a nodding acquaintance—and had my parents lived in two back rooms, my father starving in the odd intervals that he did not follow his profession of making seeds for strawberry jam; and had I been the prodigy that I ought to make myself, aged four, rising each midnight like Beethoven—or was it Sousa?—answering the call that had come to me of reciting the "Wreck of the Hesperus," in a red flannel night shirt; then I should not dream of apologising for going into the most minute domestic details.

I have pondered deeply how to begin these ramblings of mine. One of a family of four, three boys and a girl, my father, who had retired on half-pay through ill-health, could only bring us up as well as his means permitted, his income being never more than £400 a year. We lived comfortably in a small house in St. Heliers, Jersey. Pocket money was very scarce and new clothes few, for my good father's stock never seemed to diminish. Patches of varied hues in the nether garments that had been cut down were many and daring in their contrasts. Personally, I did not mind my Joseph-like appearance, and was content not even to notice that other lads were similarly adorned. But, of all the cruel things, give me a schoolboy who is bent on hurting another. His is the very refinemen

of cruelty. He can and does not hesitate to put the salt of sarcasm into the open wounds of sensitiveness. My patches and lack of funds were an admirable target for some of my schoolfellows' endeavours, and the childish tears I shed in those days took many a year to dry.

Jersey in 1880 was a dear little place. The island was full of poor ladies and gentlemen. I will not say that the absence of duty on tobacco and brandy must have proved the attraction, but everything else was so cheap that retired army officers found it a kind of India, where money went farther and appearances were not so difficult to keep up. It was here that I first knew that most delightful and beautiful of ladies, Lily Langtry, whom, though I cannot claim to be a countryman of hers, no one admires more than I do in all those lovely islands. How often has her old father, Dean le Breton, walked with me to school down the old hill of St. Saviour's, on the top of which nestles the church of the same name, where he was dean for so many years, and in whose quiet little churchyard sleeps one of my dearest friends, and one of the greatest gentlemen I have ever met, dear Henry Kemble.

I have returned to Jersey in the later days, but I doubt if it is ever wise to renew acquaintance with the places that have given us deep emotions and great pleasures. We all of us forget that it is ourselves, the time and the circumstance, not the spot itself, that have called forth something that was best in us. We see the same sun—the grass that it beats on may be as green—and the great trees perhaps only more wonderful, but the voices that rang across the meadows to us

have long been hushed and we wait in vain for those footfalls on the forest paths that we shall never hear again. The market place! The great streets! The harbour and big hotels!!! Just to see them once again! I confess that I trembled with excitement and longing, as I neared the home of my childhood. I said to myself I would go here and there, I would see where such and such a thing had happened, and I would live those joyous hours all over again, older and therefore better able to appreciate and think of them alone. But it was not to be. The market, with its old women in their white French caps, seemed tiny. The great streets had shrunk. In the shops that I remembered I saw bright and alert young men. "Is Mr. So-and-so here now?" I inquired. "Lor'! no, sir," came the answer. "He's been dead and gone this ten year!" "And who are you?" I would inquire. "I am his son, sir," would come the invariable answer.

And I kept finding myself wandering through the town, mentally shaving manly faces to try and find the lads I had known so well, or dyeing silvered hair in my mind's eye, trying to set back the clock a score of years, to make the elderly matron the "Miss" that I had admired. I was a veritable Rip Van Winkle. "Are we so soon forgotten when we are gone?' Let the man who has not stopped to realise what tragedy lies in those few words return after long absences to places that have known him.

Up a winding thoroughfare, once so imposing and now so small, down a street and past a church, and here was our house. In the front garden stands a small cement fountain, a poor little thing covered with

nasturtiums. How well I remember the day that it was set there, and how many the admiring glances and words of praise that were showered on it. And the memory of the conscious pride that we possessed what the three other houses in the row did not came vividly before me. On the front door of this granite villa was the very lock my father had put there—a Yale lock. The lady living in our house showed me its key, the very key he had worn upon his chain. The hall passage way seemed very narrow. Surely this was not where I had lived! I hurried through to the big drawing-room where the minauls used to hang, and the other rooms, from whose walls the black bucks' heads had so often fallen for lack of camphor. Yes, they were all there, but it was as a bagatelle board to a full-size billiard table. Ah! but the garden, that was large; was not the greenhouse one of the biggest in the town? Through the kitchen I must run to the green gate and make sure. Why did I halt and stand irresolute? Was it because I had some strange feeling that I should see the old gardener of by-gone years bending over his roses, or nailing up the young peaches to the southern walls? Or was it that I felt it would be impossible to open that wicket and not hear my father's voice calling as he used to for us boys to come and help him? Surely I should see him as I knew him coming towards me down the box-lined path and saying, "So, my boy, you're home at last!" just as he did when I came back late from school. But the gate opened and everything was still; I let it close behind me, and it was many a minute before I could move or speak. It was, as with everything else, the same, but it looked so

small and poor. If my father could only have walked down that path, and I could have said, "Come along with me. There are many things you wanted and you couldn't afford. Now I can give them to you!"

I closed my eyes, and I saw before me the well-knit figure of the powerful little soldier whom I had not been permitted to know and grow up for. Was it my imagination that he was smiling at me as I wept, as if to reassure me that he was happier than I could ever hope to make him? I pray so. All the well-deserved thrashings I had received were forgotten in that moment. I only realised the sorrow of being too late. I could only picture with dimmed eyes my mother and the rest of our little family who have been sleeping many a year in the peace of an island churchyard.

My school life at the Jersey College and at an Army crammer's was, I fancy, much the same as any other boy's. I studied little, I knew nothing, and was looked upon as a joke, never shifting my position from the bottom of the form year in and year out—indeed, I was always in trouble. In fact, so regular were my canings that, if I had an appointment after school in the racquet court or playing fields, I always asked from habit for ten minutes' grace, while I went to the Head's study to take my nine on the hands with his curling implement. My offences were only the outcome of high spirits—rags in the dormitories, or assisting to trundle the helmet of one of the twelve Jersey policemen down a by-street, and the like.

I remember on one occasion, at the end of afternoon prayers, hearing the usual old sentence come from the Head:—"I want to see Hicks major, at four o'clock."

I walked into the book-lined room, and, as was my custom, asked no questions, but simply held out my hand. "Not to-day, Hicks," I heard come from behind the desk I knew so well. "I wanted to let you know that you can have a whole holiday to-morrow, as I understand it is your birthday," and for the first time I left the room not hurt, but a little disappointed!

Undoubtedly the reason that I occupied my time in every conceivable prank arose from the fact that I had not the slightest desire to enter the profession chosen for me. The work had no interest for me. I have always had the greatest respect and admiration for the Army, but never had the slightest inclination to join it. The waiting-for-dead-men's-shoes aspect of it, even as a boy, never appealed to me, and the prospect of having to obey old gentlemen in cocked hats, simply because nine-tenths of them had grown so old that they were obliged to wear cocked hats, was one at which I shuddered.

Consequently I went up for my "prelim." when the time came, with no anxiety, as I knew it was impossible for me to pass. Indeed, one of the examiners told me afterwards that the only hope of a commission that he could hold out to me at any time would be one in the "Shoe-Black Brigade!" He may, perhaps, have been a little more severe than was necessary, thanks to the ingenuity of a youthful joker next me, who had, all unknown to me, filled in my identification papers with untruthful, if humorous, statements. Indeed, it became as certain to the powers that were as to myself that while I might be an officer of one sort or a gentleman of another, it looked almost

morally impossible for me to perform that very difficult feat of becoming both at the same time.

I was now nearly fifteen, and the question of what I was to be became a matter of grave consideration for my poor mother, whose slender means hardly gave her a wide choice. To tell the truth, I had longed almost from the days when I was a tiny child to become an actor. I may have inherited the taste from my father, who was the crack low comedian in all the regimental theatricals in which he appeared, always getting up, as he did, the entertainments for the soldiers and their charities.

Be that as it may, after having made my first appearance at the age of nine years as Buttercup in "H.M.S. Pinafore," I never thought of being anything but a facer of the footlights. I was cast for this part at Prior Park College, Bath, because I suppose I was "as plump and pleasing" a person as the part demanded. At that time, of course, the witty lines of the great humorist who wrote them were to me unintelligible, and I wondered why the house roared as I replied, in answer to a question, "That is the idea I intended to convey." But I have learned in later years that the lack of knowledge of the author's meaning is not wholly confined to schoolboys.

The theatre at Prior Park College was a permanent one, and on revisiting it some time ago I found it to be one of the best of its kind anywhere in England. After "Pinafore" I became a sort of star, being always cast for good parts, and having all my inclination for the stage fostered by the priests. One old gentleman, by the name of Shepherd, who taught me elocution,

had, I remember, a tantalising way of illustrating things with fruit and other delicacies applicable to the word. Many a time he would say "Open your mouth wide and round your lips. Say 'orange.' Now open wide enough to put the orange in your mouth," and he would hold the orange up before my eyes. I would bravely make the attempt, hoping I should be given the fruit for my prowess, but no! it always went back to its dish. The old man committed suicide during my period of tuition with him, and I have been so near doing the same thing after listening to reciters that I often wonder whether I was an accessory to his hurried departure from this planet.

Wybert Rousby, who had the Theatre Royal, Jersey, was the first actor I remember, and I used to think him splendid. I have often followed him about the streets wrapt in admiration—often have I been to see him play in "The Battle of Jersey," a drama which was a favourite in the islands, and often, too, in the tableau of the well-known picture of the same name, where Major Pierson is lying dying, while his black servant points a gun at a woman and a boy in the Market Place (the boy, by the way, being Mrs. Langtry's grandfather); often did I (aged eleven), I blush to say, flip peas from the upper boxes on to the dying Pierson, who could only twitch his face every time the aim was true—though Wybert used sometimes, when he was dead, to open his eyes and look up with a "you-wait-you-boys" expression, and we used to exit hurriedly. I gather that his "Belphegor" and his "Man in the Iron Mask," which I frequently saw him play, were considered good second-class acting, though at one time

in his career he looked like becoming a great star. He had a very handsome face, but his height was against him, he being short for a tragedian. In his later years he at times used to love to tell his reminiscences over a rather too flowing bowl, the consequence being that his good wife put him on an allowance of 6*d.* a day. This he told me, adding—"But, dear boy, do you know what I do? I save it all up, and then spend the lot on old Scotch ale on the Saturday." He was a fine, if rather ranting type of the old melodramatic actor, and I often think of him with many an affectionate remembrance.

It was directly after I had been ploughed for the service that I repeated what I had been so often forbidden to say, that I intended to go on the stage. This suggestion, as always before, was immediately knocked on the head, and instead I was sent off to start life in London as a wine merchant's clerk, with no salary and an allowance of 1*s.* 4*d.* a day to pay for my train fares and buy my lunch.

Oddly enough I found myself in Leadenhall Street in the offices of Frederick Toole, a nephew of one of the kindest of men, J. L. Toole, whose company I was afterwards to join for such a long and happy time. I loathed that office, but was there not a good omen in my being sent into the wine trade? Did not Henry Irving commence as a wine merchant's clerk, and did not the great Garrick himself assist his brother in his wine business off the Strand? The thought of this helped me a little, but oh! the life!! Making out trade accounts, assisting in the cellar to bottle cheap clarets, and taking out pockets full of metal discs made to represent sovereigns, with "Toole's Whiskey is the

best" on the one side, and the price of the delectable liquor on the other, with instructions to leave them in all public places whenever an opportunity occurred; a coffee and a bun for lunch, and then home dog-tired for dinner at seven. That was the day. What a nightmare it was! I endured it for six weeks, doing everything possible I could think of to get discharged. At last I was successful, and I was pitched out neck and crop as a boy who could never hope to succeed, for (idiot that I was) I had signed bills of lading to get quantities of champagne out of bond instead of port. I wonder if it has ever occurred since to the kind-hearted wine merchant in whose employ I then was that his young clerk had done it purposely.

Discharged with ignominy! This of course led to the discussion of my future all over again. Failed for the Army. Failed in the City. My mother realised that her swan was a very inferior duck, and it was on the occasion of my unworthiness being thrust down my throat with more than usual severity that, losing my temper, I said "Home or no home—money or no money—I am off to be what I have always set my heart on since I was a little child—I'm off to be an actor."

The storm burst in all its fury. Relations eyed me with a look I have seen on men's faces when they watch the prisoner leave the dock for Portland! Perdition!!! that was the terminus for which I had taken a single ticket!!! But the stage was my destination, perdition or no. Five-and-twenty years ago a gentleman, to use a much misapplied word, was rare on the stage. Nowadays gentlemen hover round it as thick as May-flies

on a Hampshire stream, and the majority of them, I grieve to say, are extremely bad actors.

But this is by the way. The moment arrived. I was turned out of my home with the few clothes I possessed, and no money, the hope being, as I learned afterwards, that this would bring me to my senses. The first sensation of being alone in London without a penny, but my own master, and about to become what I had so longed dreamed of, an actor, was to me extraordinary. Fifteen years of age, no knowledge of the world, eight weeks' acquaintance with London, and not a soul to whom I could apply. What was to be done? First of all, I set to wondering where I should lay my head that night.

Rich relations I had, living in Kensington. My pride would not allow me to approach them. No. I sat down on a bench in Hyde Park, and I then suddenly bethought me of an old servant of ours who, after many years of hard drinking and bad cooking, kept a lodging house in Cornwall Road, Bayswater. Thither I tramped, and poured out my woes to the good-natured creature, who at once offered to give me a helping hand. The kitchen sofa was placed at my disposal, and the scullery sink pointed out to me as a substitute for the Turkish bath. Poor soul! it was the best she had to offer, the rest of the house being let in floors to impecunious tenants, who left her religiously alone to her libations. Move one. I had a roof above me and a horsehair sofa beneath, over which there hung a cheap German print of the meeting of Wellington and Blücher after the battle of Waterloo.

And now, move two was to find someone connected,

no matter how remotely, with the theatrical profession. I racked my youthful brains, and remembered that a Mrs. Pratt Barlow, who was an old friend of my family, had a son in Baker Street, and that he was a theatrical acting-manager—whatever that meant.

The next morning I therefore sallied forth anxious and expectant, to call on him and see what would come of my visit. I found the house and was ushered into a top floor room, where, sitting in an armchair with his feet on the mantelpiece, I found a clean-shaven young man (clean-shaved! An actor! My heart bounded!!) smoking a pipe. He was coatless, but wore the most wonderful green waistcoat, crossed and re-crossed with bright yellow stripes, that I had ever looked upon. Again my story was told, the end of it being that this young man, whose stage name I found to be Lilford Arthur, told me that he was "*managing a show for Charles Warner at the Grand Theatre, Islington, for a fortnight, and if I were intent on making a fool of myself, he, for my own people's sake, would help me to that end.*"

Away we went in a hansom, one of the few I had ever been in, to the dingy old theatre in Islington, christened by some humorist "The Grand." I found myself jostled through a narrow door, and down on to a dark and dirty stage, lit only by what I afterwards learnt was a "T" piece, which consists of a few gas jets flaring from a piece of straight iron piping. Crowds of dirty-looking men stood about, waiting to be chosen as supers in the next production, and I was told to wait with them while my guide, philosopher, and friend would find out from the prompter what could be done.

While waiting, sundry complimentary remarks were

flung at me by my motley comrades, one I remember being to the effect of "What does a toff like you want to go on the stage for, taking the bread out of other people's mouths? Pipe 'im, Bill, he's got on a clean shirt!"

But their gibes were unheeded, my fate was trembling in the balance. I could see a discussion going on in the prompt corner. I did not wait long. A boy about my age, with a bright smiling face, came up to me and said, "Are you Hicks?" I said that was my misfortune, and he said, "Well, my name's Matthews—A. E. Matthews. I'm the prompter, and you can start supering if you like."

Like! I nearly embraced him on the spot. "You can only have one shilling a night," he said, "but if you can do a small part, they'll probably give you a bit more."

The moment I was engaged I was a professional actor, and the thought of that more than the money made me as grateful to him for his words as I have ever been in my life to anyone.

The rehearsal began. I was chosen with other supers to be a guardsman, a convict, and a gamekeeper, and several other highly important portions of different crowds. Then a call came for those who could speak lines. My friend Matthews stood with a packet of brown paper covered "parts" in his hands scanning us closely, looking, as I have often done since, for some gleam of intelligence on the faces of small-part young men, and he called for those who could speak lines. To-day Matthews says that the words were hardly out of his mouth before I had taken at least nine parts out

of his bundle. Be this true or not, I remember that I did enact six different characters, and that I did speak some odd lines, no doubt very oddly. But Matthews helped me and showed me many kindnesses, and no one rejoices more heartily than I do at the great success he has achieved to-day in the parts in which he stands without a rival. In those days he, too, had only just commenced his career, and, exchanging confidences, we became fast friends. When he knew my circumstances he took me home to his mother's house and gave me meals, for which I was then, and am still, very grateful.

On the stage everything was strange. The play was a revival of "In the Ranks," and was being put on in great haste. Everything was a rush and a scurry, there was no time for the courtesies of the modern London production. It was "Hurry up," "Get on," "Get off," and "Why the devil aren't you quicker?"—every day for ten days.

The first words I ever spoke on the stage were to Charles Warner. I had, as a postman, to deliver him a letter through a lattice window. I was unable to open it, it being jammed and minus a latch, so deftly pushing my fingers through one of the pieces of open work trellis, meant to represent glass, I opened the window and spoke my line—"A letter for Mrs. Drayton." Warner was out of temper that morning, a chronic condition, I afterwards learned, of all actor managers with small-part people, and called me an infernal idiot, asking me if I generally opened windows in that way in my own home—*if I had a home!* He little knew how nearly he touched me—my home was a horsehair sofa, a German print, and a sink. I tried

to explain, but the artistic temperament loathes explanations, and so I let it go at that, and felt for quite an hour that my career was over. However, the great night came, November 11th, 1887, and I arrived very early at the theatre, with a lot of confidence and a little make-up, and inquired where I dressed. Under the stage, I was told, and accordingly down I went to find myself in a veritable piggery. All about me, with their clothes, which had been soddened with a day's rain, in front of them in bundles, were the sandwich men who had been walking the street that day advertising the drama. At night they were to be guardsmen, yokels, villagers, guests, and so forth. I shall never forget that moment. I took my place among them on a bench, and did as they did, changed my clothes for those I had to appear in on the stage. If anything could put a budding Thespian off his job, this I think would have done it, but I faced it as unflinchingly as Kean did the road from Penzance to Bath. My kind friend Matthews gave me hints as to make-up, and on hearing where I dressed moved me on the second night into a room with some old actors, high up in the flies, which was better, though the heat was stifling, owing to the gas battens that grilled and sizzled all about us.

Never was I prouder than on that evening; every incident of it is engraven on my memory. Whether as a soldier who cheered Warner for taking the Queen's shilling at the end of Act II., or as a convict leaving jail, I was enthusiastic and elated. I had made the great plunge. Only one thing struck me as funny that night; I found myself leading a procession of betrothed lads and lasses from the village church, with a poor

lady literally older than my mother, who was on the eve of giving to good Queen Victoria another loyal subject. I can hear the music now that she and I, in our Paul-and-Virginia-like love, danced to.

This first fortnight of my career was by no means an amusing one, though the old cook whose kitchen I adorned was generally too poor to buy food or too intoxicated to know the want of it ; and being quite without funds of any kind, a cup of tea in the morning and a piece of bread and butter was about all the food I had during the day till night came on. But I was an *actor !* and what cared I ? The way I used to manage was to set aside 3*d.* a day, and walk in the afternoon from Bayswater to Islington. The piece over, I went to the nearest potato can stall, and filling my pockets with the largest and hottest I could choose, started on my walk back home, arriving there in the small hours. It was November, and the friendly potatoes kept my hands warm, and then, Fregoli-like, turned themselves into the most wonderful of suppers.

It was by the greatest good fortune that I did not meet my death at the old Grand Theatre, Islington. On the night of the tenth performance, when the curtain had fallen, I started to take off my make-up as usual with some cocoa-butter. "Laddie," cried one of the actors in the room, "open your hands and take it off with this. Cocoa-butter's no good." And accordingly I did as I was told. A liquid was poured into m alms, I dashed it straight on to my face, and rubbed it well into my eyes. It was spirit-gum, which is composed mostly of turpentine. The joke was a poor one, the pain was excessive, and it was a good two

hours before I was able to put on my hat, and with streaming eyes try to find my way down a darkened staircase.

After groping about carefully I at last reached the stage, to find it in pitch darkness, there being no light of any kind except the glimmer of a small pilot in one of the front battens. I wandered about for some time stumbling against pieces of scenery, dress baskets and stage furniture, and eventually found my way to a green baize swing door that I knew led into a passage at the end of which the street stage door was situated. I passed through, walked on, reached the door and turned the handle, only to find it locked. I shouted again and again, but no one answered. Then the truth dawned upon me. If the watchman was not on his rounds in the front of the theatre he must have gone home, and I was alone in the vast building. Never before or since have I had such a sensation. I shouted again. I kicked the door with all my might in the hope the noise would reach some passer-by in the street, but the only sounds I got in reply were my own words echoed back to me through the empty corridors.

I am bound to say that my tweed clothes suddenly became transformed into one of W. S. Gilbert's suits of blue funk. Narrow passages in the dark are the most uncomfortable of all places. If anything passes you it has to pass so very close. So I began to feel my way along the wall back to the stage. By this time I had got into such a state of nerves that I expected each time I put my hand out to find it in the face of some one coming in the opposite direction. I knew that sometimes supers have been found asleep in the cellar

of the theatre, and it did not take me very long to be quite certain that not only was there a man, or men, somewhere in the darkness, but that they were desperate characters, and knew that I was at that moment groping along that particular wall in fear and trembling.

I now moved very quietly, kicking myself hard for having been such an idiot as to have shouted as I had done. At last I pushed against the pair of green baize swing doors again, and I found myself on what I knew to be the stage itself. I stood perfectly motionless in the vague hope that I might see a friendly lantern moving about in the front of the house. But everything was still. One, indeed, could have taken handfuls of silence out of the blackness, it was so intense. The small remains of my fifteen and a half years' old courage had now completely bidden me a good-night, and the only question in my mind was as to where I should be safest when the blow was aimed at me, for that my time had come I had now no possible shadow of doubt. Even to-day I would far rather take a good thrashing, in the broad daylight, from a six-foot navvy, than remain in doubt in the dark as to from what point of the compass I was to be struck at; and on this occasion I felt I was to die on an empty stomach, for of course I had been unable to turn my 3*d.* into the usual wonderful baked potatoes.

After some thought I determined to get my back to a wall and sit on the floor for the night. This, I felt, would attract the least attention from the eyes that were watching me, and it would be uncomfortable enough to keep me awake. No one who has never been

shut up in a theatre can realise what a grim place darkness can make it. A neighbouring clock struck one; I had a good six or seven hours before me.

I waited and waited, and then I heard what, to my acute ears, sounded like a charge of cavalry. Crash! bang! something had fallen. A cold sweat of relief broke out on my forehead as I heard a faint meow! It was only the theatre cat holding a midnight revel. I am continually being chaffed for perspiring on the stage when I dance. That cat is to blame. In one brief moment it turned a provision of nature into a habit. All through the night I was on the jump. In the days before electric light was in general use, all the theatres were lit by thousands of gas jets, the battens over the stage being of wood covered with thin sheetings of iron, holding practically all those lights by which the stage was illuminated. Towards two o'clock in the morning the process of their cooling commenced. Bang! bang! bang! cried one. Crash! shrieked another. For an hour these iron monsters became almost human in their savage groanings. For all I knew, they may have been cursing the quantity of bad actors they were condemned to look down upon each evening. If this was the case, I don't think their noise was half enough. But, oh! it was a nerve-wearing affair that weird night.

I must have fallen asleep, for I was awakened at seven o'clock by the dirtiest-looking woman I ever remember to have seen in the early morning. I asked who she was. She told me she was a cleaner and when she found out how I came to be locked in all night she confessed to me that she was the bride of the

night watchman, who had left his post to be at home with one of their children who was very ill, and implored me not to say anything about it lest her husband should lose his job. Needless to say, I did not. But I thought a lot, for the very next night, two hours after the performance was over, the Grand Theatre, Islington, caught fire and was burned to the ground. Had the actor who gave me the spirit-gum postponed his joke for twenty-four hours, I should have been roasted more successfully than I have ever been since by my critics.

This fire, although it was no doubt a serious affair to the proprietors, was far more serious to me. They were insured, but my 10s. a week had come abruptly to an end. Another start had to be made—but where? My trusty Matthews suggested my going down to the old Olympic Theatre, in Wych Street, where my friend Lilford Arthur was managing for Mr. Yorke Stephens, so off I went. I saw him, and he said he was sorry that there was nothing he could do for me at the moment.

CHAPTER II

THE PROMPT BOX

Two or three days elapsed, during which time I had been to all the theatrical agents, and with unblushing effrontery had entered my name on my old friend Mr. Blackmore's books as a thoroughly competent dancer, fencer, and singer, etc.; in fact, I think the only specialities for which I professed no aptitude were tight-rope walking and snake charming.

Things were beginning to look black. Food was scarce. My old cook was too tipsy to know or care whether the Grand Theatre had been burned or not, and so, with a courage born of hunger, back I tramped to the Olympic to see Mr. Arthur. He had not come that morning, but I was told to wait in his office. I had not been long there when a cheery, good-looking man hurried in and asked me what I was doing. "Waiting for Mr. Arthur," I replied, "to start work for him." Those last five words settled my fate. Mr. Yorke Stephens, for it was he, construed them into meaning that I was engaged and waiting to start work. I had meant that I was waiting in the hope of *being able to* start work. He flung me a large bundle of letters, saying, "Mr. Arthur is not well to-day; you had better do my letters and things instead." In a second my coat was off, and I found myself answering the door, running messages, and then sitting down to write out complimentary tickets by the hundred. In five or six hours I

wrote the words "Pass two" and "Complimentary" more often than I have ever done since for the most successful play that I have ever been connected with.

Two days passed, and Mr. Arthur returned. "Hello!" he said, when he saw me working, "what on earth are you doing here?" "I am working for Mr. Stephens," I replied. "Oh! are you?" he said; "then have a go at these." And again I was buried under an avalanche of letters, answering questions, sending messages, and in fact finding myself that very important person, keeper of the ante-room to a manager's office.

Two weeks went on in this way. How I lived at that time I hardly know. Tea and bread-and-butter, and a long walk to and from the theatre, was all I had to keep going on, except my youth and an ambition that would have vaulted the moon, when one morning Mr. Stephens said, "What is your salary, Hicks? I don't see you down for anything." And then the truth came out. They laughed heartily, and, as I had worked hard, not only approved of my engaging myself, but gave me 15s. a week as a start.

And then I begged to be allowed to go on the stage in any capacity. Well, they'd see. The end of their seeing was that I became the call-boy at an extra 10s., and thus at a bound I was in possession of 25s. a week, enough to eat and live on, and even to go by bus to and from the theatre. This was in November, 1887, and with the exception of four weeks, I have never been out of an engagement for four-and-twenty years. With a practical permanency now assured, my first move was to acquaint my mother with the fact that I could keep myself. She received me with open arms. Poor dear!

she had worried her life out about me, and I verily believe she would have allowed me to start making counterfeit coins in the back drawing-room rather than let me leave home again. All this great good fortune had come within five weeks. Though my hours began at nine-thirty in the morning, and finished when I got home in the small hours of the next day, had I not health and strength, and above all, was I not in my wonderful and splendid profession ?

The luck of the Olympic now changed. E. S. Willard, a young actor who had taken London by storm as The Spider in "The Silver King," came to star with Henry Neville in the revival of "The Ticket-of-Leave Man." I was promoted to under-prompter and given a few lines; and so, shaking the dust of the office from my willing shoes, I began the life I had longed for—behind the curtain. And what a lot there is to be learned at the prompt table! There you can watch the working of big minds; all their alterations are filtered through the prompter's brain into the prompt-book. He gets to learn the reason why things are done. I think I learned more in the two years I was doing this than ever afterwards.

Henry Neville of course played his original part of Bob Brierley, and how the house used to rise at his truly magnificent performance, and how kind too and gentle he was to all us midgets who served in even the most humble capacities! And Willard! He was my dramatic god. To me he has always been, and always will be, a joyous, affectionate, and instructive remembrance. I worked for him in production after production, sometimes under great difficulties, and sometimes

meeting with his displeasure. But irritability is excusable in a man who has not quite reached his position, and is waiting for a public to shout "All right" when he has passed the post. I remember well his once slapping my face. It was on the first night of "The Ticket-of-Leave Man." There was more than the ordinary excitement among the audience as to whether he would again make good, this being his first starring engagement, I think, after leaving Wilson Barrett; so that when he stepped on to the stage as The Tiger, made up in a silver crape-hair beard, the house fairly shouted at him. But he had not gone very far when there were slight titterings from the stalls and whisperings from the other parts of the auditorium. He grew slightly uneasy, and then, from where I stood in the prompt corner, I discovered what had happened; his beard had become unstuck from his left cheek and was hanging down below his necktie. I endeavoured to draw his attention to the fact, but he would not look. In my anxiety for my idol, I tried coughing, stamping, and various other devices, all of which failed. I then in my eagerness to help him picked up a ginger-beer bottle and began tapping it with a piece of iron, and continued this throughout his big scene. What he must have gone through I can understand now. The curtain fell on the act, and as I stepped towards him he boxed my ears—I wonder he did not kill me. When the play was over, and had ended in a triumph for him, I explained as well as I could, and he was more than sorry for his loss of temper, which was amply justified.

There should be no law against the murder of prompters who fidget. The first line I ever spoke in

London was on this occasion, and I was fined a shilling for gagging it. I had to exit as an office-boy saying, "Good-day, sir, I shall be back in an hour; I'm going to have a game of billiards." The slang catch word of the town at the time was "*good old*" everything, and being certain to get a laugh, as I felt, I said, "Good-day, sir, I'm off to have a *good old* game of billiards." The house roared, and I got fined a shilling. This taught me a lesson, and from that day to the present time I have always felt that gagging is a most reprehensible practice, and I hope all will avoid it—as I do!

This first performance was full of happenings. An old actor who was playing the part of Mr. Gibson, the banker, in the scene of the burglary, rushed on to the stage in the last act, tripped up, fell on his face, and in the flurry and excitement shouted, "Help! help! the cash-box is open and the safe has gone." This caused great fun and amusement in the gallery. But the most amazing and touching thing which occurred that night was when a dear old actress, Grannie Stephens, just before going on in a front scene, was told at the side of Mr. John Clayton's death, which had occurred in Liverpool. She was one of his oldest friends, and was moved beyond expression. Poor old lady! she was a great age even then, and the shock so unnerved her that in the middle of one of her long speeches, in which she was getting roars of laughter for scolding Green Jones about his trotters, and Miss St. Every Monkey, as she called Jones's sweetheart, about her marriage, she burst out crying, and looking at the audience said, "Oh! ladies and gentlemen, I can't go on! Poor John

Clayton is dead!" It was very pathetic. I think this was the last time she ever appeared.

1887 was just at the end of the lesser palmy days. It was at this time that every piece which was perpetrated by any kind of author was tried at a *matinée*. I often prompted four new productions a week—all of them running one consecutive performance, ninety-nine per cent. never having the smallest chance of getting into an evening bill. Strangely enough, these pieces were nearly always played by the same group of actors and actresses; a little *coterie* who had not the luck to be in continuous work at night.

If any stranger was seen about the stage, it was five to one he was making arrangements to book the theatre for an afternoon performance. It was owing to this—and I know he will forgive my telling the tale—that my old friend Bassett Roe, who was always the pink of courteous attention to everyone with whom he came in contact, drew from some wag the remark: "The reason dear Bassett takes his hat off to every servant girl he meets is because he thinks that some day she may be giving a *matinée*." Certainly the strangest people did appear, never to be seen again after their one afternoon.

This *matinée* vogue gave amateur authors an opportunity of paying to see their absolute rubbish played by professional actors; and that abomination of abominations, the amateur actor and actress, would constantly have the impertinence to appear in any classic part they fancied, supported by a first-class professional company, whose lack of means in most cases obliged them to subject themselves to this, the greatest of

indignities. As may be supposed, most of these performances were put on anyhow, and so many amusing things occurred at them that if ever we were dull or in doubt as to how to spend a happy afternoon, it became the fashion to go and have a good laugh at some amateur's Hamlet, or at the atrocious rubbish labelled a "New and original play in four acts." I remember one poor soul who played Hamlet, with all the best actors in London to support him, his only recommendation for the part being a rather fine narrow forehead and a receding chin. He was the son of rich parents, his father having made his money in a very large carrier's business. The *matinée* must have cost £500 in salaries alone. The laughter began at Hamlet's entrance, and continued merrily throughout the afternoon, a mighty roar arising when the King (was it by accident or design?) misquoted his lines to the Queen, and instead of saying, "Full thirty journeys hath the sun and moon," etc., substituted for them, "Full thirty times has *Pickford's van* gone round." A week later the melancholy *matinée*-giver started for Australia, and threw himself overboard in the Bay of Biscay. Sad though his end, it is a step which all amateurs should seriously think of taking—though, if possible, before and not after their appearance.

It was about this time that another of these lunatics, disporting himself as the Moor of Venice for one performance, was advised that no real artist ever played Othello unless he blacked himself all over. This he religiously did, but I am bound to say he had more presence of mind than many an old hand would have had when he found himself in a difficult position, for

on the great day at the end of one of the scenes, the words failing him altogether, he, with the utmost coolness, simply put one hand on Desdemona's head, and pointing to Heaven with the other, said, "More I cannot tell you, child! But there is One above who knows all. Ring down!" The humour of this sort of thing may not appeal to the layman, but it helps considerably to lighten the lot of the poor professional.

The motto of the amateur seems to be, "It is better to have had a frost than never to have played at all."

To me he always has been, and always will be, a red rag. I resent their playing at my work because they can manage to buy a wig and learn a few words. They never realise that the art of acting is as difficult as any of the arts, and they choose it gaily as the vehicle for their incompetence; though they never dream of buying brush, paints and millboard—the use of these being no more difficult, the only difference being that they leave a smudge and dirt on the painter's canvas, and convey nothing, while on nature, although they convey even less, there is no record of their outrage. "What do you think of our Amateur Club?" said an enthusiast to W. S. Gilbert. "I think they are not so much a club as a bundle of sticks," said the master of repartee.

In mentioning amateurs, I speak of that vast majority who like to paint their faces in aid of mythical charities. I do not, naturally, include such an actor as Mr. Alan McKinnon, who, had he chosen to become a professional, would have made a great name for himself; or, indeed, of many of the Old Stagers Dramatic Club who, with their excellent art, delight the audiences they play to each year at Canterbury.

But the others—oh! most of the others! ! !

Good amateurs are as hard to find as the village drunkard who does not insist on impressing upon you that his ruddy nose is caused by indigestion and not by alcoholic pleasantries.

The way productions were dodged together in those days cannot better be illustrated than by describing a *matinée* performance we gave of "Macbeth" at the Olympic. This tragedy was given by a Mrs. Conover, who went on for Lady Macbeth and engaged Mr. Willard to play Macbeth. "Held by the Enemy" was in the evening bill at the time, and as we were short of Shakespearean sets, I conceived the idea of utilising for the *matinée* performance some of the scenery we used at night time in the drama. This we did, and the modern drawing-room scene of Act II. in "Held by the Enemy" became the dimly-lighted "Banquet Hall of Macbeth" and the same scene later, upside down, with the curtains off, became "The Battlements by Moonlight."

Very few of the actors knew much about the Immortal Bard's intentions on that afternoon, and in a daily paper the next morning that prince of critics, Clement Scott, gave me my first notice. He wrote in finishing his column:—

"And the prompter, although seen at rare intervals, soon became a favourite with the audience."

In after years at the Court Theatre, I remember well he wrote of me as follows:—

"A young gentleman by the name of Hicks played the part of the other brother. No doubt he will become a real idol of the public, for he shouts so loudly that

they will always be able to hear him by standing outside on the pavements and will never be obliged to pay to go in and see him."

Scott could be cruel, but many actors to whom he did great services quite forgot in the days of his troubles with them that he could also be kind. Few critics knew so much about acting—none more. And he did not do what so many critics are so fond of doing—damn the player's method without pointing out the remedy. I had the pleasure of knowing him very well. He was a very tender-hearted man; and it was this trait in his character that really led him into fights and discussions and partisanships which ultimately ended in his going to America, much to the loss of the English stage. He was a man of moods, and was apt to get hysterical and go either to one pole or the other—flaying alive, or caressing to death. He did some playwriting, and the story is told of his adaptation of "Denise" which, true or not, is amusing.

It had been in the hands of several London managers, each having it as his property for a considerable period, and each in turn paying a considerable sum of money on account of fees, which became forfeit to Scott on non-production. At last Augustus Harris took an option on it, he paying £200 on account of royalties. Being in want of a piece, Harris decided that he would try the play at once. A friend of Scott's got the news first hand, and rushing to the author's house, shouted: "All my congratulations, old man; Harris is going to do your play!"

"Is he, by George!" said Scott. "Then I am ruined!"

Of course, there were occasionally good *matinée* productions, but they were few and far between. One, I remember, was of an historical drama that went smoothly enough until almost the very end of the last act, when there came one of the biggest laughs I have ever heard in a theatre—a laugh, of course, that was not intended by the author. The house was full of actors and actresses who would be perhaps quicker to see the humour of the situation than others, as the loss of a "property" created it, and the loss of words or of important properties generally is the form that an actor's nightmare takes.

The scene was a dungeon, and in it chained to the wall was a Royalist hero on the eve of execution. The heroine entered to bid him farewell for the last time, and a scene was enacted between the pair in which the withers of the audience were wrung, watching as they did the breaking of two hearts and the parting of a devoted man and woman. The main object of the heroine's arrival, in addition to saying farewell, was that she brought for her lover's use a small phial of poison which would cheat the hangman on the morrow and spare him the indignity of a public execution. In the nervousness of a first performance, however, the lady who played the heart-broken girl forgot this part of the plot entirely, and left without handing over the all-important means of escape. The actor realised her mistake when it was too late. She had gone; in vain he called for her return, but she came not. In vain he walked to the prompt corner, but, as is usual when a prompter is really wanted, he was not there. The situation was a hopeless one, and he stood in the centre

of the stage, beginning his last farewell to the world without the faintest notion of how he was to get out of it. No sword, no gun, no poison, no anything. The actors and actresses in the audience were quick to see his dilemma, and waited with sympathetic eagerness to see what he would do. The inspiration of genius came to him, and with tragic intensity he declared:

"And so to-night I die. Yes. Never, oh! never shall it be said that the last of the De Courceys fell by the hand of the paid executioner; no, never! never!" And suddenly, with a convulsive twitch of the head and the raising of his arm, he cried, "Ah! Thank Heaven! I have broken my neck!" and fell prone.

The play was ended. It is not unlike the story of the actor who in a scene of an escape from Portland, to his horror found that there was no warder, as there should have been, to shoot him dead as he made his bold dash for liberty. The play depended on this warder's gun being fired. The actor, as in the previous story, had to die, so throwing up his arms, he, too, fell lifeless, crying "Ah, shot, shot! and by an air-gun!"

Things equally ridiculous, though necessary, were always occurring—audiences expressing themselves with no uncertain voice and no hesitation to be personal. I remember myself playing the part of the Doctor in "Heartsease." Grace Hawthorne was the Camille, and—I hate to say so—she was by no means good as the consumptive heroine, a fact that the audience were not slow to recognise; so that in the last act, when she lay dying, and her maid Ninette turned to me and said:

"Doctor, is there any hope?" And I replied:

"She will be better in the spring," a voice from the

gallery rang out clear and bright, "We 'ope to Gawd she will, gov'nor." (Loud cheers.)

Talking of audiences making personal comments, I remember hearing at the Richmond Theatre, not many years ago, a remark from the pit which made me laugh and amused the house enormously. A gentleman who was playing the part of the Cardinal in "Under the Red Robe" was extremely bad, and the audience had been fidgety throughout the evening, and were thoroughly conscious they were witnessing a most inferior performance on the gentleman's part. At the end of the last act all the characters in the play attack the Cardinal, and he, finding himself alone and without power, turns on his tormentors, crying, "Am I then only a howling pelican in the wilderness!" A man in the pit rose, saying, "Oh! is that it. I've been wondering what the hell you were all the evening."

In the early days of 1888, with Henry Irving at the Lyceum, Wilson Barrett at the Globe, and a big drama company at the Olympic, a regular nest of what were termed the "legits." (that is, serious actors) were always to be found forgathering at the east end of the Strand. I frequented a little restaurant in Holywell Street in company with the younger members of these three theatres, and it must have been ridiculous to have seen us, although of course we were all thoroughly unconscious humorists. The young men in each theatre were all from top to toe the image of their respective leading actors.

The stamp on the Lyceum youths was immense. Aged from eighteen to twenty-three, most of them cultivated the halting gait, the muffled tones, the long

hair and drooping hands of their great chief. They flung themselves into the restaurant and across the couches in pieces, ordered the waiters to hurry the dinner (a 1*s.* 3*d.* ordinary with claret) "with all haste," and by the time the sweets were reached they were ordering their cheese in blank verse.

I was one of the few representatives of the Olympic, and I was an exact replica in miniature of Willard. My hair was grown long at the back, dragged away from the left temple, my chin was well pushed forward, and the deadly frown of the famous heavy man shadowed my quite inoffensive face. A very high collar, a broad-brimmed hat, with an Inverness cape, to which I had added a replica of his Malacca cane—and the get-up was complete. I sailed into this restaurant with the somewhat lurching walk and rolling head that he, I think, assumed a little in those days, and ordered food as if I were planning the robbery of the restaurant's dripping-dish that night "when all was dark." Our one aim was to be taken for actors. I never went anywhere without some sixpenny books of French's plays in my hand, and loved it if the occupants of a third class carriage on the Underground looked and nudged each other—whispering, "An actor!"

The Wilson Barrett division were less artistic looking, perhaps, than the penny Lyceum tragedians, but they were the Beau Brummels of Holywell Street to a man. With curly hair falling in well-arranged, impromptu-looking clusters, with bunches of gold seals on their fobs, and staccato voices, they were indeed a funny crew.

To-day one sees the budding Trees filing out of the

stage-door of His Majesty's, but absent-minded though they try to appear, with their voices a cross between a bad attack of laryngitis and a Solomon Eagle with a Dutch accent (of course, bearing no real resemblance to Beerbohm Tree whatever) they are nothing like as eccentric as we were in our day. How the man supplied the dinner for us at 1*s.* 3*d.* a head, I can't conceive. Soup, a piece of fish with yellow sauce and three capers on it, etc., etc., joint, veg., and sweets—I can smell it all now! It is true he sold articles of a different nature on the other side of his premises, the waiters being experts in French literature as well as attending to our wants; so perhaps the swings paid for the roundabouts. One-and-threepence certainly couldn't have given him a large profit on five courses, with cheese. Many who afterwards had the good luck to be unsuccessful, or have become their own managers, poor devils! were among that company.

Martin Harvey, Jimmy Welch, and another, who shall be nameless, with a sable coat he was so proud of that he wore it through the entire summer and used to punt in it on the river on Sundays, and dozens of familiar names to-day recall the young men of that time. Mind, those I have mentioned by name *never* imitated their managers—I want that to be distinctly understood, or I shall see libel actions looming round from half the solicitors' offices in London.

Six months flew by, and "The Ticket-of-Leave Man" came off. Many new plays were produced, among them being a gloomy affair called "Christina," and it was at one of the last rehearsals of this piece that I was dismissed from the theatre by one of the authors.

Standing with a white flag upon a narrow spiral staircase, it was my duty to signal to the flyman to let go the cannon-balls that run into the thunder-box. On the night in question I gave the signal—bang went the cannon-balls, but the wood of the box being old and rotten they smashed through it. Down came two of them on the staircase on which I stood, and while I was busy saving my life another cue went which I was unable to signal. The furious author refused to allow the rehearsal to proceed until I was turned out of the theatre as an incompetent idiot, and as this gentleman had money in the production, out I had to go.

On my way to the dressing-room, holding together a broken heart and knowing that I had been treated most unfairly, I saw Mr. Willard's dresser being discharged for drunkenness. Here was a chance! Anything rather than leave the theatre; and I begged Mr. Willard to give me the job. At first he wouldn't hear of it, but my entreaties at last prevailed, he feeling as I hoped, that being in the theatre as anything might get me my old position again. And we were right, for I had only been his dresser for two nights when the management sent for me. I don't say it conceitedly, but I had become very useful at the Olympic. I was there all day, early and late, and worked like a slave, so I was missed. "Ask Hicks" had become a sort of catch-word for people; and now there was no Hicks to ask, so I was sent for, and, explaining about the cannon-balls, found myself doing all the old routine in which I was learning my business.

The piece was a failure, but I remember one thing

about it. I played an old retainer of seventy who preceded Mr. Willard on his first entrance, saying, "This way, down the path, Count." I had a most elaborate make-up—older, I suppose, than Methuselah. While we were waiting Willard said, "Great goodness! are you made up as a bit of cheese?" This was a bit of a damper, but the entrance was at hand and there was no time to alter anything. I got my cue, hobbled on to the stage, and the audience, thinking the eccentric-looking little old man was Willard in a new creation, cheered and cheered and applauded till the rafters rang. The temptation was too great for me; in all probability I should never hear anything in my life like that for myself—I bowed my head and took the reception. When Willard did come on there was a yell of laughter, the audience seeing their mistake and being very much amused, I suppose, at my impertinence! I need hardly say the next evening I followed, instead of preceding, the leading actor.

The round of each day and night for my year or so at the Olympic was much the same: rehearsing all morning and afternoon and playing and prompting in the evening. Work had become a habit, and from a habit grew to be the greatest pleasure as, thank goodness! it has always remained. Talking of habit, I remember Wilson Barrett telling me a story of an old call-boy of his who retired from that post through being unable to run up and down the stairs quickly enough at the age of fifty. He went into the undertaker's business and became a mute. His place at funerals was always immediately behind the hearse. One day, as the funeral procession wended its mournful way, a German

band struck up in a side street. The call-boy heard it, and absent-mindedly opening the hearse door called "Overture and beginners, please!" This sounds, like most women, "almost too good to be true," but the story is not bad and does not deserve the usual "And did he?" at the end of it.

CHAPTER III

ON THE ROAD

After we finished at the Olympic, Yorke Stephens and most of the ordinary London company started on a long provincial tour. I was sent off as assistant stage-manager, playing quite important parts, my salary having been now raised to one pound ten shillings a week. The novelty of travelling, the constant change and the greater responsibilities opened up quite an exciting time. But in the provinces of England in those days (it may not be so very long ago, perhaps five-and-twenty years) the actor was looked upon not only with indifference but with absolute contempt by the majority of the landladies, whose custom it was not to take in "professionals," as we were termed. Many and many a time in looking for lodgings I have been asked the question, "From the theatre?" and the reply being in the affirmative, bang went the door in my face.

There is an old story of the earlier days that on the approach of a troupe of travelling actors journeying by road into a town, a cry would go up, "Hi, mother, take in the washing, mummers be coming!" But this I doubt. The vision of a country clothes-line has never caused me even the smallest tremor of excitement.

Provincial lodgings are desperate things. On arrival the landlady, a red-faced, portly woman, with bare arms, asks you to call her "Ma." Why, I have never

quite been able to understand. More than often she shows you a photograph of an extremely plain young lady in tights, with legs that make you wonder if there is ever a time when asparagus is not in season, and exclaims proudly, "My Annie." "My Annie," it appears, has been the great success the year before at the local pantomime as one of Sinbad's club friends, it having been voted by the entire town that the way Annie had said "And I," when Sinbad said "I vote a B. and S.," was a thing that would not be forgotten for many a long day in Sloshem-on-the-Push.

Unless you want to annoy a provincial landlady, and make her in her anger surprise you by giving you a clean plate, you must always call her "dear." I suppose the lack of attention on their husbands' part must be made up for to these worthies by the affectionate demonstrations of their lodgers. There is always a visitors' book in theatrical lodgings, with fearful and wonderful quotations in it and recommendations to try "Ma's Cottage Pie," or "This is home from home," etc., and from cover to cover the careful and minute descriptions and addresses of the persons who describe and recommend "Ma" make one rather wonder whether the book is used for "Ma's" benefit or as a record of the visitors' own whereabouts and triumphs, should some manager happen to open it.

The only appreciation of a provincial lodging that I ever saw with real delight was one line over the name of Charles Brookfield. It read:

"Quoth the raven ——"

The landlady to this day does not know its meaning,

and shows it proudly, thinking it is probably the catch-word of a topical pantomime ditty.

Some of these keepers of theatrical lodging-houses have a trick of either pilfering in all the smallest ways possible or of breaking china and ornaments and putting them down on the bills as the lodgers' work. One old actor, John Howell, with whom I lived, and who is chiefly remembered because when he went to America he advertised his address in the *Era* newspaper as "Atlantic Ocean clear, please," invariably travelled with six mustard tins. The first time I saw them I asked their use. "One moment, laddie," he replied, "and I will show you." In these tins were various things: tea, coffee, sugar, etc. "You note these comestibles. Well, laddie, I have a feeling that this week we shall be robbed, and I am going to test her nibs," meaning the landlady. Round the room he went and caught six flies, putting one into each tin and replacing the lid. "Now, laddie, we will go out for a walk, and on our return, should one of those flies have escaped, never, laddie, will there have been heard such a row in any lodging-house in the kingdom."

Baths, too, are things which are not considered absolutely indispensable in many of the northern towns. I remember at Hanley complaining that there was no warm water, and that my bath must be brought punctually at nine every morning. The landlady looked at me and said, "A bath every morning, lovey! You must get mighty dirty at the theatre every evening to want a tub every day. Eh, lad, theatre must be worse than coal mine!"

Sometimes I lived on tour with three other men, and

by clubbing together I managed very well on a pound a week. Each took it in turn to cater. I, however, was only allowed to do this for one week; economy even in those days was not my strong point, and I nearly ruined the household by giving them a joint a day, instead of making Sunday's dinner "appear again," as the old chairmen at the music-halls used to cry to their patrons. Talking of those extinct functionaries, I remember once hearing a Lord Chesterfield of the hammer sticking to his guns, on an occasion when an artiste had thoroughly displeased the audience with her first effort. She had left the stage to cat-calls and other tokens of our English audiences' appreciation, when the chairman cried, "Miss de Vere will appear again, ladies and gentlemen." This provoked more adverse criticism, during which a man in the pit rose, and amidst the din shouted, "Miss de Vere is an ugly, drunken devil, and she can't act, sing, or dance for nuts!" The chairman turned, bowed politely to him, and without comment replied, "*Nevertheless*, she will appear again." Nevertheless! It was immortal!

With my living expenses at about 23*s*. I now found myself able to squander fourteen sixpences a week. And really, looking back on those days, I often think how many of us in after life ever get so much ahead of the game, as to be able to live like fighting cocks and still be able to put away a quarter of our incomes.

Ah, those times of freedom from responsibility! they were happier days than we imagined. Then a theatre of one's own was what we prayed for—to-day, the same prayer, but that it may be someone else's.

How anyone with the ability to earn a fine, steady

salary all the year round can be so insane as to barter away peace of mind for the sake of seeing his name a little lower or higher up on a poster is to me incredible. The only financial alteration in position of the actor who goes into management is that he discusses with his partners phantom profits—profits that enter a box-office like a wraith and stalk through the theatre till they reach the production account, and then disappear into the night leaving no trace of anything tangible behind him. If a man is a manager—let him manage. If he is an actor—let him act. The latter is the more difficult, but if a combination of the two is attempted it generally ends in the poor fellow giving early morning performances to a syndicate of Scotch gentlemen, acting hard to them off the stage, and doing little but manage to get through his part on it. Even if the finances by some accident are satisfactory for a time, the worry flung at him from all quarters the moment he takes up the reins of management will compel him to alter his choice of characters. "Eton boys" no longer must be his, but "staid old gentlemen," for he will find he has as many lines on his face as he has been used to in his parts.

"Oh, blessed sunshine!" "Oh, glorious river!" "Oh, rippling seas!" "Oh, dearest wife and heavenly child!" Fancy how many of us have been obliged to forego all your delights, simply because we have elected to see those awful words, "Under the management of" over our names. Let the speculator who gets his pleasures and fresh air by breathing deeply into his pass-book, manage. He wants no exercise to keep him fit. He can get into a bath of perspiration every

morning by reading last night's receipts. Leave him to it, then, and be happy. As a rule, theatrical backers are tricky, unpleasant people, whose description might be put into children's geography books as "A large body of gentlemen not entirely surrounded by money."

The thing that struck me most about the regular provincial actors whom I knew was, in most cases, their absolute indifference as to whether they ever appeared in London or not. For nearly fifty-two weeks year in and year out they journeyed from town to town quite contentedly, and indeed holding, I daresay quite rightly, the London actor in contempt, as cramped in his methods, and feeling that the breaking of a teacup in some tragic scene was about the most violent emotion he was capable of.

The real old high-falutin' actor one reads about, with curly hair and a fur coat composed of real rat trimmed with cat, was not in existence when I went on the stage (was he ever, I wonder?), though there certainly was a type to be met with in the provinces at this date not to be found now.

I remember well an old-timer who, like one of Caleb Plummer's toy horses, was as near nature as one could get for 8*d*., holding forth grandiloquently in the bar parlour of the "Peach Tree" public-house, Nottingham.

The bar parlour of any hotel near the theatre was the actors' clubland in those days, and it was here on the Sundays that all the professionals forgathered, the old ones to discuss their future plans, the young ones to listen—as I did—deeply interested in the glories of the past. I supplied as my share of the evening's amusement as much as my pocket would allow me, for

the libations which are most necessary to the smooth running of any old actor's story. The friend I mentioned went by the sobriquet of "Dingbats" Milson. Dingbats was the slang for feet—Milson having a pair of somewhat wayward ones, so much turned out that they looked as if they hadn't been on speaking terms for years. He stood leaning on the bar polishing it like an expert, and reeled off stories of triumphs in the forties.

All these things struck me as wonderful, and timidly I asked Mr. Milson if he had ever played Hamlet. "Hamlet, laddie, Hamlet—a thousand times! Ah! and what a cast we had at Motherwell, a town in Lancashire —laddie, they speak of my performance there on the street-corners to this day. Ah! what a cast. The Dane: Your humble servant, myself. Claudius, King of Denmark: Griegson—every inch a king. Gertrude: by the lady who honoured me by bearing my name. The Ghost: Parkins—stately Parkins, when not in liquor. Laertes: Courcell, good man and true, deadly to the softer sex. The Digger: Watson—genial Watson —humour personified; and the fair Ophelia—by the lady who at that period of my career was living with me. Ah! that was a cast if you like, laddie! Thank you, my boy, since you press me—I'll take a gin and peppermint"; and the rolling tear that had gathered no moss for many a day made its entrance, soon to be lost to view in an ample, though discoloured, shirt front.

They were fine old champions of a bygone day—these hardy swashbucklers of the early fifties; their harmless exaggeration was amusing, and in no way detracted from their many lovable and generous

qualities. One old tragedian I knew well, who, in his time, had played many parts, managed to save enough money to settle down in his native town of Leicester, and buy for himself a little business—selling for a living all kinds of goods, including things as widely different as tobacco and quack medicines.

One of his specialities was what he advertised as his "Elixir Dramaticus," and his description of it was to me most amusing reading; it was worded in this way:

ELIXIR DRAMATICUS.

The proprietor respectfully directs the attention of the dramatic profession to his wonderful Elixir Dramaticus, of which he is the sole inventor and proprietor. This marvellous preparation is warranted to cure—

Pains in the back.
Dimness of sight.
Loss of memory.
Fear of bad parts.
Incapacity for acting.
No desire for curtain calls.
Horrors of early rehearsals.
Indifference to cues.
Dread of stage waits.
Blushings on meeting your manager.
Avoidance of the lime light.
No wish for the centre of the stage.
Insanity.
Death.

Price one shilling and three halfpence.

Try it to-day. Next week you may get your notice.

The only other cure I know of for the above ailments peculiar to the actor is, full salaries for *matinées*—I hope they always get it.

My life as assistant stage-manager on tour was no great catch. In the country theatres, "You can't have it" seemed to be the stock phrase, and every Monday it was the prompter's duty to journey round the town to various emporiums and try to borrow suites of furniture, pictures, etc., for dressing the scenes with, armed only with some free seats to be given for the loan.

The keeper of an old furniture shop at Birmingham said to me once: "You want a suite of old oak, do you?" "Yes," I replied. "And you will give me two pit tickets for nothing?" "Yes," I replied again. "Well, if you don't get out of my shop, I tell you what I'll do." "What?" I inquired. "I'll turn you towards the setting sun and kick you in the east" —which immediately made me follow the old stage directions of "Exit cautious through gap in hedge."

Many are the shifts to which the poor stage-manager on tour is or was put at nearly all but the very best provincial theatres. Most of the second-rate houses were run by a stage staff consisting of a stage carpenter and his family,—the gas man's only qualification for his post being that he was the carpenter's nephew.

There is practically no management even to-day in the provincial theatres, with the exception of about half-a-dozen, the best by far of these being Mr. Chute's house at Bristol. They are in the hands of theatrical speculators, who, as long as they can manage to pay a dividend of any kind to their shareholders, made out of some dozen bookings of London stars in every year, allow the theatre for the other forty weeks to take care of itself. Some day, I suppose, the London managers

will wake up to the fact that they are the heart pumping the blood into the provincial arteries, and instead of being dictated to by "*les juifs syndicats*," will go on tour on their own terms, or leave the provincial Chrysos to starve, as they certainly would do if the big attractions were withdrawn from them.

I well remember the hall at one small town in which we were appearing being situated above the premises of a large general provision dealer's. The drama we were presenting had as its big sensation a river scene, for which we travelled a huge indiarubber tank capable of holding enough water two feet deep for boats to float on. During the second performance of the play—at this particular place of entertainment—the tank sprang a leak and the water flowed out on to the stage, and took a great deal of management to mop up. In the middle of the proceedings I was told to go down at once into the shop below and ascertain what all the disturbance was—for disturbance there was of no common kind. The act had just finished, and rushing downstairs I found the keeper of the premises, who I knew from his accent must be a German called Murphy from Chicago, in the middle of an excited group of customers. I inquired what was the matter. "Matter!" he shrieked, and turning on me he pointed angrily to the ceiling; "the matter is that your damned drama is leaking into my shop." It was quite true, and what we had to pay him for his biscuits which had become sop, and other edibles which were floating gently round the counters on a summer cruise, was more than the gross receipts for our performance.

CHAPTER IV

AN ISLAND NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT

THE ordinary actor's life in the provinces is an appalling affair. Even to-day the young men can learn little or nothing there, most of the older members of the company being quite incapable of showing them anything, and I was heartily glad, after travelling for a year and a half, to find myself once more in London rehearsing at the old Princess's Theatre in Oxford Street.

The Princess's Theatre at the period was under the management of Mr. W. W. Kelly, of "Royal Divorce" fame, who was running that perennial drama on its first production most successfully.

Kelly was a wonderful showman, brave and cheerful under circumstances which would have made most men tremble, and fighting tremendous odds with a good humour and courage that it was impossible to behold without admiration. It was he who when the receipts fell so low that the great Cinquevalli could not have balanced the accounts and all concerned felt the end had come, invented with a flash of genius the "transfer system," a move which saved a disastrous situation and enabled him to keep the theatre open for months and months. His system was based on the contention that it is better to have a lot of people in an audience who have paid something, no matter how little, than to sell

the seats at their proper prices and play to empty benches. He therefore divided London into districts and sent every householder free seats to come and see the new drama—I forget its name. Thousands and thousands of tickets were despatched, and from all parts of London playgoers hurried to avail themselves of Kelly's generosity.

On arrival at the theatre, if they were in possession of a gallery pass they were informed that the gallery was full, but that they could have an excellent seat in the pit if they would pay 9*d.* to transfer. This offer was in all cases gladly accepted, and as this method was adopted from pit to upper circle, from upper circle to dress circle, from there to the stalls, and from the stalls to the boxes, the theatre night after night was packed, and with people who were happy to be seeing a big entertainment for a small fee, getting as they did so a much better seat than the one they had been sent for a quarter of its real price.

It was a splendid showman's move, and one that gave the astute manager time to breathe and look round. Mr. Kelly is very successful now, and I am sure he will laugh at this memory of old times. Many are the stories told of him ; he had a quick tongue and an optimism that always inspired everyone with the feeling that the next venture was bound to be all right.

I remember laughing heartily at a sally of his. He met one day in the street his then leading man, Murray Carson, who was playing Napoleon in London in "The Royal Divorce." Kelly had got an idea into his head that Carson was taking himself a little too seriously and was beginning to play the Emperor off

the stage as well as on it. "Halloa, Carson," he called to him; "have you heard the news about Hyde Park?" "No," said the unsuspecting Carson. "They've shut it up," said Kelly. "Have they, why?" inquired the actor. "Heath has hired it to make a hat for you," and he walked away.

One of the best things he ever did from an advertising point of view was with some lions that he used in his production of "Theodora." He was billed to produce the piece in Manchester, and journeyed there a week ahead of his company, taking with him his quartette of forest kings in a great iron cage. This on arrival he had wheeled to the back of the stage, saying that the animals were nice and quiet and would annoy no one. In the evening the piece, which was "Sweet Lavender" and depended on its quiet and charm, was going splendidly, when suddenly in one of the most delightful of the scenes the furious roarings of the caged lions rang through the house. The actors paused, and the startled audience rose inquiringly, a commotion commenced which began to assume serious proportions, when the figure of a tall man wearing a sable coat and a diamond ring (and of course other things) strode authoritatively into the stalls and, turning his back to the stage, addressed the crowded theatre. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in his strident voice with its American twang, "there is no cause for alarm; it is only Kelly's lions who are appearing here in 'Theodora' next week."

The play then continued, to be accompanied by roars at the back as well as in front, with the result that the incident was talked of all over Manchester on

the following day, and Kelly did a bumper business the next week.

And talking of this manager of my early days carries my mind again to Grace Hawthorne, once his leading lady. She had been appearing as Josephine, Empress of the French, for some three hundred performances at the Princess's, and decided to go one night in her queenly robes to adorn one of the late Sir Augustus Harris's Covent Garden Balls.

It happened on this occasion that the world-famous wig-maker, Sir William Clarkson, had decided to delight London by disporting himself at the ball as a blue Romeo. Clarkson's legs at all times give an excellent imitation of the Marble Arch, and in silken hose are a picture that only the brush of a Titian could do justice to. He was talking a good deal of French on this evening—Clarkson always talks French in London and English in Paris.

During the ball the Hairy-Fairy William, as the bluest of immortal lovers, became the constant attendant of the Little Corporal's unhappy wife, and a quaint picture they made. She at four in the morning, with a tired crown tilted well over her Royal eyebrow; Romeo, leaning against the bandstand, feeling, I suppose, also the effects of his strenuous Italian night. I walked towards these historical personages intending some small courtesy, but I retired feeling I was intruding on some confidence, for as I approached I heard Romeo sigh: "Ah, your Majesty, don't treat me as a perruquier; treat me as a brother professional."

Clarkson, later in the evening, was handed Juliet's prize in mistake. All this he has laughingly denied to

me, but I can vouch for the story, and it is not more far-fetched than many that are told of this celebrity, and which I think he slyly rumours abroad himself, pretending they are inventions of the enemy.

Of Mr. Clarkson's father the story is told that when Buckstone sent him down to superintend the dressing and making-up of some theatricals at the school where his sons were, he returned to the Haymarket to let the comedian have news of the success of the performances. "Well, Mr. Clarkson," said Buckstone, "how did the play go?" "Oh! an enormous success, Mr. Buckstone; you couldn't see a join." A join, I may mention for the benefit of the uninitiated, is the line made by the scalp of a wig on the forehead. It was the present knight of the curling tongs who, on hearing of the death of a rival perruquier, put all the wigs at half-mast on their stands and dressed his windows in crape hair.

But to return to the Princess's. "The Royal Divorce" ended, and the next production, although it had no direct influence on my future in London, really altered all my plans, owing to a difficulty which arose in connection with it when it was sent on tour. The drama was a nautical one, called "True Heart," an excellent play of "The Harbour Lights" type, by that charming writer Henry Byatt, which deserved to have succeeded far better than it did.

It was during the rehearsals of this play that I had occasion to go the manager's office with a message, and while waiting, I heard at the far end of the room, which was a very large apartment, one of the sweetest voices I had ever listened to. I turned around and saw a girl

standing with her back to me, looking at a poster of "Arrah-na-Pogue," which I gathered from the conversation was a new one, and discussing its merits and its likeness to the original. The light from a window opposite her was falling full on her face, and I thought to myself, as I looked at the back of a head smothered by a wealth of pretty fair hair, that if the owner of the daintiest of dainty figures before me had a face that in any way matched her other charms, she must be someone very lovely.

I listened to the little quiet silvery voice I heard at intervals making a few criticisms of the picture on the wall, and when the owner of that voice turned and looked at me before passing through the doorway, I saw one of the prettiest and most gentle women I had ever looked upon. It seemed to me that I was in the presence of some fairy elfish thing. She was quite unlike the usual style of actress I had up to then known. Her manner was very self-possessed and businesslike, and with only a casual look at the poor theatre prompter, there passed out of the room one whose eyes I was not destined to look into for five long years.

They were the beautiful eyes of Ellaline Terriss. How many a thousand times have I looked into them since that day, always and ever to find comfort and happiness in them, and a goodness shining from those windows of a soul that has never known an unkind thought or done anything but good actions to any living creature. If we had either of us had the smallest inkling that day of what might be, I wonder what sort of feelings would have been in our minds! It is

strange to look back upon. A dingy office, two people to meet and part as strangers who were to come together later, and live their entire lives on and off the stage together, sharing a thousand joys, and comforting each other in the dark hours that, alas! are for the poor player as well as his kind patrons.

But my thoughts are running away with me, and marrying me too early in these reminiscences; for the memory of my first sight of the woman who has done everything for me so fills my mind that it is difficult to write of other things easily.

The London run of "True Heart" had not been a long one, and the company started out for the provinces. They had only been away for a few weeks when it was discovered that through some mistake the drama had been booked at two theatres in the same week. As there was only one company, and neither theatre would give way, my management was placed in a very serious fix. It meant either getting an entirely new company with scenery and effects, or paying a heavy forfeit for closing one of the two theatres involved.

In despair they turned to me—I was the sort of head cook and bottle washer of the establishment—and asked me, as I knew the play so well, if I could rehearse a scratch company in a week, and dodge up some sort of local scenery at the Theatre Royal, Ryde, and get them out of their difficulty. I said of course I could, and I even volunteered, as I knew the words, to play the sailor hero myself, feeling certain that I should run the original, that fine actor Leonard Boyne, very close.

My offer was accepted: I was to be a leading actor for the first time in my life! Everything was

accordingly left in my hands, and I was given and rehearsed a very indifferent lot of cheap artists with which to paralyse Ryde.

The only other man who knew anything about the play was the son of Sir Morell Mackenzie, H. H. Morell, who at that time was starting his career as an actor. His knowledge of stage management was limited, but he offered me all the assistance in his power when we reached our destination without a stitch of scenery to mount an elaborate nautical drama in twelve scenes.

Nowadays to do this, one would feel as if one were trying to win the Derby on a donkey; but not so at nineteen years of age.

We arrived at Ryde early on the Monday afternoon, full of hope and a severe attack of youth, and immediately went to the theatre to 'vamp,' as it is termed, the production, *i.e.*, throw together anything and everything and make a show somehow. To dash through the stage door and begin drilling the stage hands was my first thought, but I was horrified when I was told that the stage carpenter would not be back till four in the afternoon, as he had gone to win the high jump at some sports near Freshwater.

I then inquired for the gas man. Ah! he had taken his wife to Portsmouth to see the great Naval Review. I then asked for the property man. "Oh!" came the reply, "the gas man does the properties." Well, where were all the stage hands? "Oh!" said my friend, "I'm one, and my mate has gone with his kids to see the stage carpenter win at the sports." Here was a pretty how-do-you-do! Only one man to do everything!

We had nothing, and our great sensation scene was a storm at sea and the saving of the heroine from a foundering steamer by the hero in a Cornish lifeboat. The lifeboat was the only thing that had been sent from London. I inquired if it had arrived safely. No, came the answer. "These 'ere two swinging water rows has come, but I ain't seen no lifeboat."

Morell and I stood aghast. Something, however, had to be attempted, so I asked my companion in distress if he was game to set to work with the scene-shifter and myself and have a dash at ringing up that night. Most decidedly he was, and in no time our coats were off, and we began searching for the various interior and exterior sets that the theatre stock scenery possessed.

I may mention that while I was a very ordinary sort of person, Morell, whose line of business was "the stage swell," was a young man who was always dressed faultlessly off the stage also. He stood six feet odd, wore the highest of collars and the smartest of boots and clothes, so that his appearance after an hour's rummaging in the dirtiest of scene docks was a thing never to be forgotten, but he stuck to it like a Briton, and by two in the afternoon, the three of us having been slaving for five hours, had made enough scenery into packs to represent the Baronial Hall, the Village Green, and all the various well-known scenes of a big melodrama.

But we were now hopelessly stumped for the wreck scene and the lifeboat. The only thing I could think of was to hire a skiff and paint it white with a deep blue line on it and hang a buoy on the bow. But where was

a skiff? Our scene-shifter told us we might manage to hire something in the harbour, so leaving him to paint some canvas and the aforesaid blue line, which I intended nailing on the boat when it arrived, Morell and I ran to the beach to see what we could find.

By this time we looked like a pair of tramps, Morell not having even a veneer of Harley Street left on his usually immaculate appearance. Oh, joy! there were two skiffs, high and dry, but not a soul in sight. We gathered from an old man that they belonged to Tom Somebody, who was sailing a pleasure-boat at the Review. The only thing to be done was to take French leave. This idea Morell fell in with, and we untied the boat and hauled it up the slip to the road. Then we were again checkmated. How was it to be got to the theatre? Magnificent! I espied a cart full of mortar. In no time we had emptied it and put the boat on it

Morell and I wheeled it through the town to the theatre. The usual boys followed, jeering and pelting us with stones. But we reached the stage door with our prize, nailed on the now ready canvas, and behold, we had a lifeboat that could live in any stage sea!

The two swinging pieces of canvas that represented waves were hung to the flies by four wires, and with a back cloth painted to represent the sea (unfortunately, on a very calm night, though, with a view of a pavilion pier in the distance), our storm scene was complete. Some pounds of rice and a good deal of noise, and we should no doubt raise the audience to unparalleled enthusiasm when the time arrived.

It was nearly five, and the carpenter and the gas-man appeared, the carpenter having lost the high jump, and

the gas-man—well, the worse for drink owing to his master's defeat. We worked on till six, getting things into some sort of order. At six we rehearsed the band, and at seven, with doubting hearts, we started to make up, Morell for the villain of the piece, myself for the hero. We had neither of us prior to this played any part longer than fifty lines in our lives.

The rest of the company I had kept rehearsing under the stage all day, visiting them when I could, cheering on my troops and seeing that they were word perfect if nothing else. The piece began and all went well with the first act, the audience, which was a fairly large one, applauding the time-honoured sentiments expressed by the virtuous heroine.

But the second act was not quite all that it might have been. The opening scene was one in which Morell was detected by me drugging a cup of wine, which I was about to drink. A hand-to-hand fight was the result, at the end of which I was arrested for striking my superior officer. But the fight on this night provoked such merriment that the arrest when it did come was altogether passed unnoticed by the audience.

Morell was as thin as a lath and towered head and shoulders over me, while I in a naval captain's undress uniform looked like a very nice little midshipman home for the holidays. It is hardly to be wondered at then when I said, "You villain, I'll break every bone in your body," and seized him by the throat, standing on tiptoe to do so, that the house saw the fun of it and began making remarks.

The fight began in real earnest—there is nothing so difficult to do as a good stage fight—and we being

absolute novices lost our heads. Over went a table, then a chair, and we rolled over and over on the floor doing anything we thought of. We regained our feet, and this was the cue for shouts from the pit to Morell of "Give the boy a chance; go on, get on your knees, long 'un." This, unfortunately, Morell did; he was then about my height and I attacked him furiously.

By this time the audience were yelling, and we being unable to finish the encounter as it should have been, I left the stage, rang the curtain bell and returned at once, saying to Morell, "We shall meet again."

This ended the scene. We stood and looked at each other hopelessly, and listened to the noise of which we had been the innocent cause in front, when a policeman put his hand on my shoulder and said he wanted a word with me. I told him at once that he was dressed for the wrong act, and must go and change into a marine for the ship scene. "I ain't no marine," he said—"never was. I've come to arrest you for stealing a boat." I begged him to let me continue the play, and I would explain all. This he said he would stretch a point and do, but he meant keeping an eye on me all the same, and so he did till the end of the evening. Everywhere I went the policeman followed. In my love scenes, there he stood watching me from the cottage window. In all the bigger scenes, one of which I remember was laid in Egypt, there stood the policeman as part of the British admiral's staff, and even on the Cornish beach at the end of the play there stood the guardian of the peace, looking at me and following me off the stage whenever I made an exit.

We had reached the end of the third act, and I was

hurrying under the stage, still followed by my keeper, when I came across the low comedian and the second heavy man having a violent quarrel. It appeared that the low comedian had borrowed *7s. 6d.* from his friend and instead of repaying it had offered to do a caricature in black and white of him and so wipe off the debt. This was not acceptable, and hence the scene. I implored them to settle their differences afterwards; I told them that the end of the act was at hand, that they were both in it, and that they had only just time to run up on to the stage. They, however, took not the slightest notice of me, but, continuing their quarrel, the low comedian struck the second heavy man, who jumping up, instead of returning the blow, gave his opponent into the policeman's custody for assault. The policeman, from habit, seized the comedian, and whipped out a note-book asking for names, etc.

In the scuffle I was able to get up the stairs, and when I did so I found the stage empty, the audience shouting and the curtain still up, the hero (myself) and these other two important characters being nowhere to be found; and the other artists being unable to say anything, had walked off the stage one by one. I did not know what to do, when Morell entered to me, trying to help things out. I said, "Ah! we have met again!" "That's right," yelled the audience in delight; "have another go at him, little 'un."

I hoped now that the company would return to the stage and play the situation as written, but not one of them put in an appearance. Instead, the policeman stalked on to me, dragging the comedian by the scruff of the neck from under the stage. "Go away," I

whispered frantically to him. "Not me, guv'nor; I've got your friend and I'm going to take you." Morell, dumbfounded, bleated out, "What for?" "For stealing a boat, guv'nor, that's what for." The idiotic policeman had inadvertently made a dramatic situation himself, and the carpenter rang the curtain down on it to the bewilderment of the people in front.

What they thought was going on I've often wondered. Of course nothing had been suggested in the play up to that moment about any boat, let alone my wanting to steal one; and how a sailor could steal a man o' war, which the policeman's line must have conveyed to the house if it conveyed anything, I have never yet been able to fathom.

The evening ended as of course it had to end, in chaos. It was the comedian's duty to fire the rocket apparatus to the sinking ship; he, however, being locked in a dressing-room was unable to perform this act of heroism, so in despair I put on a moustache and a suit of oilskins and spoke all his lines, saying, "Ah! there is Jack (that was my name). See! he is steering the lifeboat with Nell Carlyon (that was the heroine) in it safe and sound."

I rushed off the stage, jumped into the boat, tearing off the disguise as I did so, and entered as the hero to a round of applause. In a moment this was turned to cat calls, for the wheels of the mortar-cart on which the boat was still fixed came a good foot and a half above the swinging waves and gave the entire show away. It was a terrible night—one I have dreamed of, but the like of which I have never encountered.

When the curtain fell, when the policeman had at

last been squared, and everything connected with the boat explained, I sank down utterly exhausted, having failed in the impossible. Morell and I nearly cried, and were discussing if it were wise to open the theatre on the next night, when a knock came at the dressing-room door, and a kindly-looking old man, with white hair, his face beaming with amusement, said, "My name is Arthur Cecil. I have seen the performance to-night; it was capital fun!"

CHAPTER V

THE KENDALS

ARTHUR CECIL, who at that time was in the zenith of his London success, was on a holiday in the Isle of Wight, and his strolling into the theatre that evening altered my whole life. He was good enough to say that he thought I had every prospect of succeeding in my profession, and he would give me a letter to his friend Mr. Arthur Chudleigh, who was then managing the Court Theatre, London, with Mrs. John Wood. This letter I duly received, and directly the week was over I hurried off to the Court Theatre with it and inquired for the manager. I was very frightened, I remember, expecting to see some hard-faced gentleman appear, when to my surprise a chubby-faced young man of about eight-and-twenty opened the door and said, "Hulloa! so you're the kid Arthur Cecil says can act. Well, I can do nothing for you at present, but I'm going to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Kendal; they want someone for all their boys' parts to go to America. Come along here to-night. And if you like we'll go and get some lunch."

This was my first interview with one of my very greatest friends, and we often look back on it now, he, whenever I do a new production, saying, "The impertinence of your producing anything! I remember you as a meek, servile youth twisting your hat round and

round, and keeping your place in front of your betters. Now, here you are talking to me on an equality, you tyke! I wish I'd had you out of the office that day I first saw you; I would, too, if I'd known you were going to annoy the public as you have." And on he rattles to-day, if anything more inconsequently and more like a schoolboy than ever, although twenty years and more have passed over his head since our first meeting.

Nothing will ever alter one of the dearest and best-hearted fellows that breathes; even when he is worried over some new venture he is a delight to watch. Many a time have I seen him on a first night, when he has not been over-sanguine as to his new piece, welcoming the critics into his theatre, saying, "Walk up, my lads, the piece is pretty rotten, but I daresay it will do for you!" He is the most independent specimen in our business, and never hesitates to tell playfully all and sundry, great and small, what he thinks of them, be it good, bad, or indifferent.

That night I was taken before Mr. and Mrs. Kendal for inspection. I had the rule run over me, and the end of it was I was engaged to play "the boys'" parts at £6 a week and to sail for New York in a month's time. No money could bring the feeling of overwhelming joy I experienced when I signed that engagement with that great artist and wonderful actress which was for a year certain and an option on my services for a following year at £8 a week.

I was now an absolute millionaire, and I felt that financially I had reached the maximum my work would ever command. From 10s. to £6 in three and a half

years; it was wonderful! and I believe for one inflated moment I began to feel I was a real artist. This is a dangerous thought at any time and one that has wrecked many a promising career. If I ever did have any sneaking desire to tickle my artistic temperament into anything but that which it should remain—a dormant and forgotten partner—Mrs. Kendal soon convinced me that the last thing any real artist did was to talk art, walk art, eat art, and drink art. Show me the man who talks acting from the art end of the telescope and I will show you one of life's successful failures—an actor with his limitations as clearly defined as are the Plimsoll marks on a ship's hull, and, what is far sadder and less excusable, a bore of the worst kind.

It is only when men have no fear of catching cold through an overdraft at their bankers that they should dare to talk art. For then we can punish them by borrowing their money. The owls that label themselves artists, who, alas! are becoming all too common, are hatched into life by those colossally impertinent incubators the "schools of acting." Smith from Peckham herds with Miss Jones of Tooting, and Brown from Brixton, with these two as a background, is looked upon in the school as a rising Salvini because at the last audition he gave an entirely original reading of those famous lines:—

> "Mary had a little lamb,
> For which she didn't care a —— bit;
> And the truth to tell of Mary,
> The lamb didn't care a —— bit for Mary."

Oh! you professors of elocution, you "masters" of

one of the most difficult of arts—how dare you?—you naughty boys!—how dare you endeavour to teach these poor youths how to succeed by schooling them in the methods in which you yourselves have failed? How dare you teach the young idea how to shout? If you were all really honest you would say to them, "We teach because we want money, but we don't believe very much in it all. If you like to come to us, knowing this put down your guineas, open your narrow chests, push forward your truant chins, and we'll help you to make idiots of yourselves every day from 10 till 4"—that's fair enough; but to encourage some of the poor wretches who have come to me for engagements from your schools, having as much aptitude for the stage as a blind kitten in a pail of water, is alike cruel to them and unfair to the old actor, whose only means of ekin out a living is by supering or taking the tiny parts which are now handed to the youth or young lady who has duly qualified and pleased certain "actors (?)" who teach, and who, when they come to rehearsal themselves have to be shown nearly everything.

One poor young woman came to me once and begged for an engagement. Her appearance was the most unlikely on earth. She was possessed of an indiarubber backbone and had a gentle, timid manner wedded to a shuffling gait, so I made polite excuses; but she would take no refusal. I must hear her recite, and out of pity more than anything else I listened.

To her qualifications as an elocutionist, she had added a slight hare-lip, with the help of which she waded steadily through the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet" with parrot-like incorrectness—much as the

horrid thing the child-reciter does when, in saying "I heard the whistle and I saw the smoke," it puts its right hand over its eye on the word "heard" and its left hand over its ear on the word "saw."

When she had concluded I asked her where she came from, and she mentioned a well-known school of acting. "Really," I said, "and how long have you been there?" "Three years," she replied; "and Mr. —— says I am now an actress. You've heard me as Juliet, but I want to tell you that I am equally good as the Nurse."

Poor thing! Three years of wasted endeavour! One could have told her in the first three minutes of that time that she might make an admirable mother, but that is as much as one could say with certainty of any woman with her physique.

I don't know now what qualifications a stage aspirant wishing to enter a school has to possess, but a story which is a good one is told of the early days of Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Academy. It was the custom that all candidates for the school should recite or read before a board of *experts* so that it might be decided if they were quite unfit to join the "school." I believe a club foot was a drawback, and—unless it was hereditary—lameness was deemed a sufficient reason for not letting an individual show the experts his tricks.

It was the custom that before coming forward each young man paid a guinea as an examination fee, which, if he seemed hopeless and was judged unfit after reciting to come into the magic laboratory where the virgin ore was to leave the dramatic experts' crucible as pure gold, was returned to him, and he left the room with a few kind words.

It is related that on one of these occasions Mr. Tree to encourage the somewhat timid collection of lads and lasses who had come up for examination that particular day, rose, and telling them not to be frightened, recited a passage from "Hamlet."

Immediately on his finishing a humorist who was sitting on the committee of taste called him up and handed him a guinea, saying he could hold out no hope to him under any circumstances.

Needless to say, this never occurred, but if many of the actors I know were given a guinea for not being able to act whenever they asked the question as to their qualifications, what a really large quantity could keep continually asking with a certainty of remuneration !

In speaking of teachers of elocution I do not include that splendid artist Rosina Filippi, who has much the same power as Mrs. Kendal. She was with us off and on for many years, but never opened in a play that she did not want to be off to some new production. Hard work and not long runs being her hobby, this earned for her the nickname of "*Resigner* Filippi" instead of Rosina. Nor do I allude to Elsie Chester—a fine actress, from whom a mine of information is to be obtained.

But to return to Mrs. Kendal. I don't know what her views are on schools, but I do know that there never has been anyone so opposed to the cant and humbug side of the theatrical profession as she was. I have often heard her talk of her early days, born, as she said, practically in the theatre, and weaned on grease-paint. Having been in her profession from infancy, woe betide any charlatan with long hair, abstracted

manner and a minimum of desire for the sponge, who crossed her path if she was not in too good a temper.

Once when one of this type was rehearsing the part of the Duc de Bligny in "The Ironmaster," Mrs. Kendal, to whom I was devoted and whose twinkle of an eyelash I had grown to understand, watched him very quietly for some time and becoming, as well she had cause to be, dissatisfied with his methods, leaned across and said quietly: "Mr. Smith, may I ask if you are going to play the scene like this at night?"

"Oh no—no, Mrs. Kendal," came the answer; "but I cannot do justice to my work without an audience."

I shall never forget the look that flashed out of the two little brown eyes of that inimitable artist at this. "Oh, you can't, can't you!" said she; "then you shall have one now to help you, as I want to see what you are really going to do; it will no doubt be most instructive. Go, someone, and fetch Mr. Smith an audience—run out and get some little boys and put them in the pit, so that Mr. Smith may do *justice to his work!*"

Out went messengers into the highways, and nothing would induce her to let the rehearsal proceed until her orders had been obeyed. After waiting ten minutes, that seemed ten years, some dirty little urchins were procured, and when they were comfortably seated in the front row of the pit Mrs. Kendal said: "Now then we can go on—Mr. Smith has got his audience, and will be able to do justice to his work." The actor left the theatre hurriedly, and indeed left the company for good a fortnight later. It was very hard, perhaps, but it was none the less unpardonable on his part to add

insult to injury by rehearsing badly and then excusing his work by trying to whitewash it in the art bucket.

But what a mistress at rehearsal she was! Nothing escaped her—she was one of the very finest stage-managers it was possible to conceive. She rehearsed every part in the play if necessary, and showed men, women and children equally perfectly. I have seen her snatch a hat and stick out of a man's hand and enter, playing either a fop, an angry husband, a hero or a villain better than the actor cast for the part could ever hope to portray him. No one ever taught children so well—no living person to-day ever knew the stage better. How often have I heard her say: "Act! How can you hope to act, my dear Hicks, before you know how to walk the stage!" The walking of the stage I may mention is a most difficult, necessary and neglected art, and she taught me to walk it and taught me all I know—which may not be much, but it is not her fault. She used to frighten me to death; I was conscious that she knew everything, and she never spared me except on rare occasions. "Why did you move then?" was a thing she often said, and if the reply was "I don't know," she would rap out, "then for Heaven's sake keep still unless you have a reason." And her remarks on stage pauses too were illuminating. Her motto was, "Never pause on the stage unless it is necessary; but if you do pause, pause for an hour if you want to."

If any woman deserves to be recognised as a great exponent of a beautiful art Madge Kendal does. It almost makes me a rabid upholder of the militant suffragette to feel that because a woman isn't a man she cannot receive recognition for her life's achievement.

Oh! for the days of an "art order of merit"—such as France has thought of for her brain workers. Only a small piece of ribbon for something well done. How doubly precious it would be, from the fact that the Mayor of Mudville, who becomes a knight for having handed a cup of tea to royalty on a village railway station, will never be able to receive it. Would that for my profession tired Prime Ministers could think of something different than the weary sigh of, "Oh, give him a knighthood!"

"Last nights London," which looks so unpleasant across a theatre bill, would certainly look better if it were spelt with a "K." Perhaps some day the princes of my art will no longer be extinguished by finding themselves cheek by jowl with the intellectual purveyor of pig iron, or Sir Loin the butcher, and Sir Osis the inventor of a patent liver medicine. An honour given in such company makes a man wonder if he hasn't been born a gentleman and died an actor.

Ah! Mrs. Kendal—"Ma K." as we younger members secretly and affectionately called you—when shall we see your like again? you with your kaleidoscopic moods—you who were as changeable as an April day, who charmed and frightened, angered and delighted by your fascinating uncertainty—I lay my homage and my grateful thanks at your pretty feet. Come back to the stage, for your mantle lies where you left it, and the moth will be in it before any are found fit to pick it up or try to pin it on their all too unworthy shoulders!

CHAPTER VI

U.S.A.

THE company I was in late in 1890 which sailed for America with the Kendals was a very fine one. It was the second big English combination that had visited the States, Henry Irving's tour of "Faust" being its immediate predecessor. The passage out to New York was extremely rough, and on the night set aside for the usual concert in aid of a sailors' charity some unconscious humorist sang pathetically the well-known ballad, "Hard times outside the cabin door." As many and varied were the appliances for the alleviating of sea-sickness to be seen along every passage way, it is hardly to be wondered that a sickly smile lit up the faces of those who had left their berths to be present at the entertainment.

Our *répertoire* consisted of fourteen pieces, many by Mr. Pinero and the rest by all the foremost authors of the day. I was in every play, and really had some splendid parts—the gipsy in "The Squire," the boy in "A Scrap of Paper," Henri de Flavigneul in "The Ladies' Battle," Faubert in "The Money-spinner," etc., etc.—and we marched on New York with hopes of victory which were justified beyond all expectation. "A Scrap of Paper" was the opening attraction at the old Fifth Avenue Theatre. At the end of the first performance the audience rose and waved handkerchiefs

and programmes and shouted themselves hoarse, notwithstanding the fact that the piece had been a great success at Wallack's with American stars in it. This night set the seal of success on the entire enterprise, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal making a great fortune in America. The seats for all performances were sold in many towns at enormously increased prices. As an instance, and not an unusual one, in Chicago I remember the 6s. seats fetched as much as £3.

Theatrical America twenty years ago was not what it is now. The interchange of actors with Great Britain had not commenced then. For every one American actor in England there were a hundred English ones in New York, and on arrival we were anything but popular with our American *confrères*. Indeed, in those days the ordinary American man in the street generally disliked English people and lost no opportunity of passing remarks at their expense. The saying then was that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian"; we altered it into "the only nice American is the travelled American."

But twenty years have come and gone. To-day Americans have all travelled. To-day they are all nice to us whether they have visited our shores or not. I haven't had the pleasure of acting in America for some seven or eight years, so I can't speak of their stage of to-day from personal experience; but what a splendid set of actors there were in the States in the early nineties! The Stoddarts, the Lewises, the Gilberts, the Drews, Sothern, Edwin Booth, Jefferson, Barrett, Florence, Mansfield, etc., etc., were alive, and enough more if they were all mentioned to cover reams of

foolscap. I have always thought the American stage, in general, was miles behind ours in the delicacy of production, in leading men, juvenile young men, leading ladies, and *ingénues;* but in character actors, comedians, strong actors, eccentric comedians, musical comedy artists, dancers, and specialty actors, we are and never have been anywhere near our American brothers and sisters.

But I am digressing. It would be an impertinence on my part to say anything of the great people I had the privilege of watching act in America in those days, and as my impressions of the United States are of no interest to anyone, I will confine myself to jotting down recollections at random of the theatrical happenings to myself or those I met in my business there. I would however warn the unsophisticated not to take too seriously the steamer acquaintance who asks you to stay with him at his home for six months in Philadelphia, Pa., impressing on you the fact that his "mother is a lovely woman, sir, and would just adore to see you walk right in. Our house is yours." This class of Statue-of-Liberty impulsiveness merely means "Good morning; you are looking very well to-day," and, begun at Sandy Hook, is forgotten by the time the Custom House eagles have ruined your new summer underwear.

The part I played in "A Scrap of Paper" in New York was that of Archie Hamilton, the boy in the Eton jacket. Even in those days I had a very deep voice, and one paper in its criticism of our first night said: "The performance was a memorable one, but it is a pity the Kendals have brought over a middle-aged man

to play Archie when we have so many clever boy actors on this side who would be glad of work." This amused us considerably, but the fact was I was really to blame, for being as I was inexperienced, I did not know the difference between comedy anger that helps to raise more laughter, and an indignation that although real in itself was of such an intense kind as to kill the comedy proportions of the scene, checking the merriment of the audience at intervals in its abruptness, and spoiling the continuity of Mr. Kendal's fun in the amusing duel of Act II. altogether; but I was very young, and Mr. Kendal was very kind and he knew that I tried hard to correct my errors.

I have never been a favourite with the Press, generally getting either bad notices or very qualified praise, no doubt most justly. I remember saying so to Charles Wyndham once, and he comforted me by remarking: "You ought to see my notices when I first played David Garrick. They call it my triumph now, but the same performance when I first played it was received more than lukewarmly. Don't worry; when you begin to get good notices be careful." I have never had to be careful yet.

I remember Miss Ellen Terry saying to me "Oh! how tired I am of the papers calling me charming, or saying that my performances are full of the Terry charm! Oh, my! I wish they'd try and think of something else."

As regards myself, the criticisms on me I think are set up in permanent type in most newspaper offices. They generally say "His amazing vitality," or "His irrepressible and somewhat tiring efforts," or "He

seemed to perspire more than usual on this occasion" ; —a notice of this kind drawing from Mr. Pinero the remark of "Seymour, I'm not sure they are wrong. If I were you I should not advertise 'Doors open at eight,' I should alter it to '*Pores* open at nine.'" Which is much what Henry Irving said to Richard Mansfield, when that actor, asking him on a very hot night what he thought of his Richard III., Sir Henry with a twinkle in his eye said, "Well, my boy, your skin acts well—Have a cigar?"

The great actor delighted even as much as his bosom friend J. L. Toole in a little harmless teasing, an operation in which for delicacy and point he stood unrivalled. What could have been better than when after witnessing the performance of "The Village Priest" at the Haymarket he went round to smoke a cigar in Mr. Tree's dressing-room. And sitting there for some half-hour he spoke of everything but the play. When at last Tree, anxious to know what the great man thought of the evening's entertainment, inquired, "Well, and how did you like the piece?" Sir Henry said, "Er—er— I thought Allan was good." That excellent actor Charles Allan on this evening had played a sergeant of gendarmes in the last act, and had but one entrance and one exit, and had spoken but one line. He waited half-an-hour to perpetrate his little joke, and this being successful, was unqualified in his praise of one of the most splendid performances of the lessee of His Majesty's.

It was Sir Arthur Pinero who, during his acting days as a member of Henry Irving's company, scored off his chief rather heavily. There used to be a Lyceum

tradition that very few of the actors ever found themselves able to get to the centre of the stage, and that many a long speech was reduced to the smallest possible length. Pinero one day was sitting at rehearsal on a piece of profile scenery. Henry Irving seeing him said, "Get up, my boy, get up. You'll cut yourself." "Oh! that will be all right, Mr. Irving," said the great dramatist; "we are accustomed to having our parts cut in this theatre."

I think it was on the stage of the old Fifth Avenue Theatre that Sir W. S. Gilbert made two of the many *mots* that are always received with hearty laughter whenever repeated, and which, although not new to actors, are, I think, unknown to the general public, and therefore need no apology for their appearance here. The first was one as masterly as it was unanswerable.

The great humorist was crossing the stage, just before an evening performance, when he saw one of the chorus ladies in great distress, her face being wet with angry tears. Gilbert approached her and sympathetically inquired the cause of her trouble. "Oh, sir," said the young lady, "it's disgraceful. One of the girls in the dressing-room said I'm no better than I ought to be." "Well," said Gilbert gently, "are you?"

The other story goes that during a rehearsal Sir William's then prima donna was nowhere to be found. The author himself went in search of her, and meeting the fireman at the back of the dress circle asked him if by any chance he had seen the lady. "Oh, yes," said the obliging fireman, "she's round behind." "Yes," said Gilbert, "I know that; but where is she?

We played in New York for six weeks, changing the bill only once, I think, and before leaving the Paris of the States I felt I must be photographed, and hied me with many properties and several suits of clothes to a neighbouring studio. I mention this because I here came upon a real piece of American humour. As I drove up to the photographer's I saw a brass plate on the door, with these words engraved on it :

"The light is good to-day."

We went to all the theatres during our visit, and were treated with the greatest kindness by everyone. Once I remember driving up to a famous playhouse where the business was dreadfully bad at the time, although I was not aware of the fact. I apologised for not having written for seats, explained I was of the Kendal company, and that I should be grateful if they would allow me to see the performance. The manager looked at me silently for a few moments, and then said, "Is that your hansom outside there?" I replied that it was. He said, "Then drive it right in." I realised when I took my seat what he had meant. I and six others were the only people in the dress circle.

It was when I was present at a *matinée* in New York that I heard a quick and witty reply from that fine American comedian Nat Goodwin. He was sitting in a box just above me, watching the entertainment. It was a miscellaneous one, if I remember rightly. During the afternoon one of the performers who was giving imitations came forward and said, looking up at Goodwin, "Ladies and gentlemen, I shall have great pleasure this afternoon in giving you an imitation of

one of America's greatest actors, Mr. Nat Goodwin." The house was delighted, and applauded vigorously. Goodwin was somewhat embarrassed, but the imitation was started and finished to renewed applause. When it had subsided, the performer, very pleased at the success of his effort, looked up again at the box and said, "Say, Nat, how's that?" Goodwin like a flash, smilingly replied, "Well, one of us is rotten." There was a yell at this, and the story spread like wildfire as one of a witty man's best things, which indeed it was.

I had the pleasure of meeting that beautiful old actor Mr. Stoddart, in company with our own incomparable Fred Leslie, and I well remember Mr. Stoddart, who then was a very old gentleman, saying, "Do you know, Mr. Leslie, I have been nearly fifty years on the stage." "Lor' bless me," said Leslie; "everything you have said to you, sir, must sound like a cue." The dear old man laughed heartily, and asked Leslie what was the strangest criticism of a play he had ever read. Leslie could call to mind no particular report of a play, and old Stoddart told us he had seen a whole column left blank in a Philadelphian paper with only the name of the play and the theatre at the top and the critic's name at the bottom—and just two words, "*Oh! my!*" in the middle. This, I suppose, in England would hardly be considered as fair comment, but abroad the law of libel is not quite so easy to bring into operation.

I had a delightful time in America, and in New York in particular. In those days Delmonico's was not quite within my means, and Rourke's Oyster Rooms on Union Square was a place I patronised continually. Oh, Little Neck clams! Oh, soft shell crabs! Lucky

the flag that waves exclusively over you! The various ways of cooking shellfish and the variety of kinds of fish itself is extraordinary. Many an hour have I sat and sung their praises at that hospitable hostelry.

Once, sitting in my usual corner at this restaurant near the window, I heard a much harassed waiter score heavily off a tiresome customer who was ordering some oysters. The conversation that took place was the following—the wretched waiter turning to go and execute the order and being brought back each time:—"Say, waiter"—"Yes, sir." "I want a dozen blue points." "Yes, sir." "Oh, waiter." "Yes, sir." "Steamed, you know." "Yes, sir." "Oh, waiter." "Yes, sir." "You'll see that they are not done too much." "No, sir." "Oh, and waiter." "Yes, sir." "Will you see that they put just a squeeze of lemon in each shell." "Yes, sir." "Oh, and waiter, just the smallest amount of butter over them when you serve them." "Yes, sir." "Oh, and waiter." "Yes, sir." "Don't forget the pepper and salt." This last remark was too much for the poor knight of the napkin, and turning back of his own free will he said, "And, sir." "Yes, waiter," answered the oyster wisher. "Would you like them with or without?" "What?" said the luncher. "Pearls," said the waiter, and disappeared.

Americans are a nation of wits, from the boy who cleans your boots for 10 cents upwards. In fact, you can hear almost as funny dialogues in the streets as you used to at Weber and Field's if you take the trouble to listen for them; and don't think you're ever going to give talk, as they say, and not get back double or you are making a grave error.

A great deal of their fun is on the inverted situation idea; but it is real fun—which is more than can be said for the humour of many countries. The cannibal is the only other fellow who, under certain conditions, gets the real laugh off them. The humour is all through the country; it is as if every American baby at its birth had been told by its parents to be humorous or it would not be allowed to proceed on life's highway. Certainly, if this is so, the babes have kept their bargain loyally.

I was talking to a very pretty girl some time ago who came for an engagement—she had just left the Casino Opera Company, New York, and wanted to join me. I was asking her as to her experience, and finished by inquiring, "And do you sing?" She answered without a movement of her face: "Well, people who have heard me say I *don't!*" I need hardly say I engaged her on the spot!

Even the losses and troubles of the average American seem to be turned to a humorous account whenever possible. John Stetson, a well-known manager at the time I visited America first, was running the opera of "The Gondoliers" in Chicago. The business had been very bad throughout this season (from what cause I don't know; it was certainly not the fault of the opera), and Stetson, although many thousands of pounds out of pocket, could not refrain from getting a laugh if possible, and so altered the sign in front of the theatre from "Last weeks of 'The Gondoliers'" to "Last weeks of 'The Gone dollars'"—which was certainly sporting if nothing else.

It is of Stetson—who was, I believe, a very close man

with his money—the story is told that once while conducting a rehearsal he called to one of the chorus girls to come back and display more surprise at some incident that had occurred in the scene. "Now then, miss," he shouted; "come along—be surprised—get excited—think you have heard good news. For instance, what would you do if I raised your salary?" "I should drop down dead, Mr. Stetson," came the ready answer. Stetson joined in the laugh, and shortly afterwards he made that chorus lady his wife. So he got the last laugh—as I believe his charms were not too obvious to the naked eye.

It was Stetson, too, who during a season of opera was watching the orchestra, and from time to time noticed that the first violins did not play. "Say," shouted Stetson to the conductor, "how is it those violin men ain't playing?" "They play when they ought to, Mr. Stetson," said the conductor; "they have a long rest here." "Do they?" said Stetson, "not in my theatre. I engage them to play, not to rest—you keep 'em at it all the time, or they can quit." But although tales of his ignorance are told, probably, like the man who dyed his hair, he was not as black as he was painted, and was the peg of his time on which to hang this class of anecdote.

It was during our first season in America that Mr. George Grossmith came out and had a remarkable success with his recitals, going everywhere and being acclaimed by everyone. On his return to England, pardonably proud at his triumph, he began comparing the art of entertaining with that of acting, and held forth on his single-handed manner of accumulating

wealth. This was a little exasperating to a group of actors who had not had too good a season in England that year. And Charles Brookfield, whose tongue is the model from which the first lancet was made, was one of the number. "You fellows," held forth the entertainer, "have to take out scenery—properties, plays, and a large company when you want to perform; while I—look at me. I just landed in New York with my piano and a dress suit, and I made £30,000." "I daresay," snapped Brookfield. "But we don't all look so damn funny in our dress suits." It is sad to feel we are not all capable of saying the right thing at the wrong moment, as this undoubtedly was—but there, I suppose if we were all "wits" there would be a premium on dulness, and the clever ones would find fewer anvils to beat their brains on.

I met William Collier in America. What a comedian, a really great light low comedian, and certainly one of my biggest favourites! To him are accredited a million smart things. It was Collier who, on meeting a certain well-known American actor whose love affairs were as numerous as blossoms on an almond tree, and who had been married four times, said, "Hulloa, old man, how are you? Say, if you think of it, I wish you'd ask me to one of your weddings." And I believe he did, out of spite.

Collier is the most awful man at keeping a morning appointment—he goes to bed so early! I remember waiting for him with Charles Frohman for an hour on two consecutive mornings, at the Savoy, without his putting in an appearance. On the third day he arrived to time. I said, "Hulloa, Collier, you don't mean to

say you're really here?" "Yes," he said, "I am. I've sat up all night to keep the appointment."

Why, I don't know, but he seemed to have an idea that I was a snapper up of unconsidered trifles, and that very little passed me that I did not incorporate into something of my own and make use of. I explained to him that he was quite wrong, and I felt I had convinced him, but some months later I found I had not; for he, in sending the manuscript of a new comedy to Frohman, cabled, "Don't let Hicks read this before I produce, or mine will be the revival"!

He was received in this country with open arms, and I think enjoyed himself; but the London Sunday tried him as it tries us. It was on one of these first days that I was walking down the Haymarket with him about eight in the evening, grumbling at the ridiculous and dull state that London was reduced to, with nowhere to go and nothing to do, when I turned to him dejectedly and asked him if he could think of something to amuse us. "I'll tell you," said Collier, "something very exciting. Let us go and dine at the Savoy and listen to the Jews eating their soup." I don't know what we did, but the notion was funny, and I think I shall give myself the treat some day.

The salary I was receiving of thirty dollars a week enabled me to live splendidly in New York, but when we commenced to travel through the States it was as much as I could do to manage on it, and so I found myself not quite as well off as I had been on two pounds a week in the English provinces. Twenty odd years ago everything in America in the way of wearing apparel was most expensive, and having to renew gloves

at twelve shillings a pair, and buy new bowler hats for twenty-five shillings, a big hole was made in my weekly wage. Washing, too, was desperately expensive, and the transport of our luggage, for which we had to pay ourselves, all meant that things had to be cut pretty fine.

Then came what are termed "one-night stands," which meant playing in a different town every evening, and, of course, travelling in nearly all cases after the performance. This was the only part of the American trip that was irksome. Many a time have I got into the train after a performance, arriving at the next town we were to appear in at about twelve the next day, dashed to the theatre, unpacked my trunks, and, swallowing a few sandwiches, played a *matinée* at two o'clock! Directly the curtain fell the clothes used in the piece had to be put away and those necessary for the evening bill got ready. Then a scrambled dinner, back to the theatre, and after playing again everything had to be packed and a rush made to catch the train, often without any supper at all. In those days the management used not to pay for sleepers on night journeys, and as they cost anything from a dollar and a half up to five dollars, it was very often quite out of the question, even after the hard day I have just mentioned, to be able to afford to go to bed.

Many a time have I, in company with two other actors, who were not overburdened with salary and had families in England to send to, sat up all night taking turn and turn about sitting on a dressing-case; for when an American sleeping-car is ready for the night, if you haven't a sleeper you have to get into the corridor—at

least, so it was when I travelled there. With a *matinée* on the following day, and travelling again the next night as before, packing and unpacking, and only being able to snatch very inferior food at cheap hotels, it is no small wonder that I detested these one-night stands, the first season of which I did for a month straight off. The travelling actor in America was looked upon in those days very much as we regard an itinerant circus here now; and the journeying to and fro, the being thrown out of one hotel into another, made me very homesick.

Playing as we did a big *répertoire*, and only staying a week in each town, we had little time, with eight performances and occasional rehearsals, to see much of interest in the places we visited. I only remember many of the towns by the colour of the wall-paper in my bedroom; but though a great deal connected with this trip was unpleasant, at the times we were not in the big cities, I would gladly go over it all again and be thankful for all I learned under the splendid management I was then with.

Mr. Kendal was a man of peculiarly imperturbable temper. He used to fuss over small things at times, but was extremely just and lovable, and never interfered with his artists unnecessarily, and when he had anything to say, said it in the most quiet and kindly manner. I remember he had a *penchant* for very good cigars, and many a time have I smelt them with a large degree of envy, pleasure and disappointment.

Mrs. Kendal had much beautiful jewellery, and before leaving home had received a very handsome diamond star as a tribute to her womanly qualities from the

ladies of England. She was showing this one evening at a dinner party, and explained to the guests the circumstances under which the ornament had been presented to her, saying: "This was given to me by the women of England for being a good woman." A beautiful American lady at the table, who was as moral as she was lovely, immediately pointed to a costly necklace she was wearing, and said with a knowing smile: "Really? This was given me by the men of America for the other thing!" The laughter was long and loud, for the remark, although daring, was certainly amusing.

Our tour lasted about ten months, and we visited all the principal cities, San Francisco included. Everything was so novel and interesting that the time flew by, and we found ourselves returning home almost before we realised we had been away ten weeks, let alone ten months.

It was just before sailing for Europe I saw the first prize-fighter to exploit himself as an actor, J. L. Sullivan, play the hero of a drama called "Honest Hearts and Willing Hands," he appearing, if I remember rightly, as the Village Blacksmith. It was on a Sunday night, at Chicago, that I witnessed the performance, when he collaborated with the author in a pathetic scene in the most incongruous manner, though greatly to the audience's delight.

It so happened on this very evening "Dempsey, the Nonpareil," the unbeaten champion of fifty battles, was to meet Bob Fitzsimmons at New Orleans in a twenty-five round contest for world honours, and nothing else but the probable result of the encounter was being

talked of from one end of the States to the other Americans generally not feeling too happy as to their candidate's prospects with the mighty Cornishman, whose reputation as a great general of the ring had preceded him from Australia.

The play on this Sunday night commenced and proceeded quite normally for the first two acts, it being a rather crude drama, in which love and hate, passion and self-sacrifice were measured out in the usual and approved quantities. But when the curtain went up on the third act, Mr. Sullivan altered the entire trend of the play by creating a new situation, which, while having nothing to do with the plot, provoked enthusiasm seldom heard even in a drama house.

The scene was an old homestead, and the Sullivan family were all in great distress, owing to the machinations of a wicked baronet. Disaster followed disaster, ruin was staring them in the face, and it appeared that nothing could avert the terrible climax of the loss of home and ultimate starvation. One of the characters came into the grief-stricken household, and seeing Sullivan whose head was bowed with trouble, said, "John, I have bad news for you. The mortgagees have foreclosed, the house will be sold up, father is going to jail, and mother and all the children will be turned into the streets to starve." For the first time in the history of the play, to everyone's intense surprise, this touching announcement seemed to have no effect whatever on the burly blacksmith, and instead of speaking the lines set down for him he turned on his informant and said deliberately, "Jake, I don't care two straws if the children starve, if

father goes to prison, or mother is turned into the streets. We have got a little fellow called Dempsey to-night at New Orleans who is going to knock the stuffing out of this thing Fitzsimmons."

The drama was forgotten in a moment, and the audience cheered the thought and hope that was uppermost in their minds. Sullivan took call upon call for his sentiments. The oracle had spoken, the expert had told his countrymen that Dempsey was not to be beaten. But the oracle was wrong. Fitzsimmons did beat the "Nonpareil" that night, much to every American's surprise and annoyance.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHIP AND THE DOCK

I RETURNED to America for a second season of ten months directly after the holidays, re-visiting the same cities and playing the same pieces, and practically with the same company, which included that fine old Lyceum actor Tom Wenman, poor Dennison—who cut his throat after a *matinée*, for no apparent cause, which was a terrible shock to us all, for a more genial, jolly man could not have been met with anywhere, and the last man one would have supposed would do away with himself—Florence Cowell, Joseph Carne, John Glendinning, Harry Chart, and Violet Vanbrugh.

While I have lost sight of nearly all the original members of that first company who are still in the land of the living, Violet Vanbrugh, that sweet woman and splendid actress, I see often. We sometimes laugh over the old days, and it seems hard to realise that all these years have come and gone since we were members of the Kendal combination, learning our business, and that on our parting she journeyed off to Dunsinane and Macbeth, and I to the Gaiety, to flirt with a girl whose golden hair was hanging down her back.

Among the many noted people I had met in New York was that witty and accomplished actor Barrymore. No man of his day had a greater faculty than he of saying the right thing at the right moment. One of the neatest things I heard of him was his method of

dealing with a critic who had for years continually slated his work. It was, I believe, at a club in New York that a friend called out to him, "Oh, Barrymore, I want to introduce you to Mr. Jenkins, of the *Northern Mail*." Barrymore, without taking more than ordinary interest, said, "I should be delighted." The critic, who had written the most virulent articles against the actor, looked uncomfortable, meeting him as he did for the first time face to face. The actor rose smilingly and said "How do you do?" Those gathered round at the time all thought there would be a scene, but nothing occurred, and the friend who had introduced them, hoping to see some fun, said, emphasising the critic's name, "But this is Mr. Jenkins, Barrymore, of the *Northern Mail*." "Yes," said Barrymore, "*I know*." Still nothing happened. "But, Barrymore," the friend repeated, "Mr. Jenkins"—thinking that Barrymore did not grasp who the man really was. "I tell you," said Barrymore, "I know it is Mr. Jenkins," and taking the critic warmly by the hand he looked at him, and said, "You have written terrible things about me, but now I see you all resentment ceases." The critic looked flabbergasted. There was nothing to say. He blurted out, "Oh! you read my paper, then?" "Yes," said Barrymore; "I never get up till four in the afternoon, and it is the only early morning paper left on the bookstall where I get my journals." This is only one short story of the man who, from the number of good things told of him, seems to have even ordered his meals in epigram.

The routine of the second tour was much the same as the first, and there is little use in writing of it;

the only real novel experience we had being that we were unfortunate enough to find ourselves on a burning vessel on the second return journey. It was the *City of Richmond*, and from her looks she was older, I think, than Westminster Abbey. Many and entertaining were the rats that gambolled to and fro over the berth partitions, even in the daylight, and creaky and rickety she seemed as we steamed past the Statue of Liberty one fine June morning, little knowing what was in store for us.

It was towards midnight on the second day after we had passed Sandy Hook that, while strolling in company with two or three saloon passengers, I found smoke filling the passages near the second-class cabins. Obviously something was wrong; sailors were hurrying to and fro, officers were giving rapid orders in undertones, and seemed surprised to have come upon us at this hour in the after part of the vessel.

We naturally inquired what was wrong, and the captain, seeing that it would be useless to try and pretend that nothing abnormal was happening, took us to his cabin and said, "Gentlemen, since you have guessed that something is amiss, I will not try and give you the bull con (*i.e.*, tell you a story), if you give me your word of honour in return to keep what I say to you a profound and sacred secret." We all readily gave our word, and thanking us, he said, "I am sorry to have to tell you that this ship is on fire."

We all looked blankly at each other; I turned cold, and I got a pain where pains most often come, and felt sick from sheer funk. The captain then impressed upon us that absolute silence on our part was the only thing that could ensure safety and prevent panic.

Our cargo was cotton, and spontaneous combustion had been set up. If the hatches were kept battened down and no air reached the hold, only a slow smouldering would go on, and in all probability we should reach Queenstown without the fire bursting into flame. But secrecy as to the real truth must be rigidly observed, and with these final instructions he hurried away, leaving us feeling as if we were shilling chops upon a silver grill. The three other men, I believe, were in as great a state as I was, but we all of us kept our thoughts to ourselves, and lit new cigars and cigarettes, feeling, I suppose, that a little more fire on the steamer wouldn't make much difference.

One of my three friends was named Deane, a nervous little man of five-and-fifty, who had run through a fortune in the Army, and who had taken to the stage late in life as a means of livelihood; the second was the son of Mrs. H. Nye Chart, of Brighton, my greatest of friends; and the third, poor Arthur Dacre, a highly excitable and neurotic man, who was more emotional off the stage than he ought to have been on it.

The situation, we argued, was desperate; after two or three whiskies-and-sodas we began to feel we were heroes of the mine, and decided that bed was quite out of the question. Chart and myself, having no one dependent on us, faced the situation as one purely of personal safety. Deane, who at all times in any trouble flew to alcohol, conceived the idea of leaving this world, if he had to leave it, in the best of spirits, and at once procured six bottles of three-star oblivion brandy. But Dacre began to work himself into a state of great excitement, and rambled on about the virtues of his

wife, Amy Roselle, who was in a cabin below with two other ladies.

In vain we begged him to keep calm and reminded him that we had given our word to the captain that our mouths should be sealed as to the danger we were in; but the more he realised that he had pledged himself to the keeping of a secret, the more the fact that he held a secret preyed on him, and he seemed entirely to lose his mental balance.

He cared nothing for himself, he said, it was the woman he adored, the artist who had not yet come into her own—to think she should be burned to death at her time of life (as if it really makes any difference at what time of life one is roast or boiled)—suffocated and then drowned; or perhaps the ship would explode, he said, and then—or perhaps he might be saved and she taken from him! On he went in this strain till, listening no longer to our entreaties to be calm, he rushed down the companion-way from the smoking-room to the cabins, and burst into his wife's state-room.

He woke her up, and seized her, saying, "Darling, I have always been a true and devoted husband to you, haven't I?" The startled lady, half asleep and half awake, answered in the affirmative (whether it was because she was in this dazed state that she said, Yes, I don't know), and asked him what on earth was the matter? "My darling," he shouted, "this is perhaps the last kiss I shall ever give you—our hour has come—we must say good-bye. We are as two spirits at the parting of the ways—we who have loved each other so are starting on our journey to the Great Beyond!"

By this time Dacre had spoken all the dramatic

platitudes he could remember out of the various pieces he had played in, and not only his wife but the two other ladies who shared her cabin were thoroughly alarmed. They begged for an explanation, and Dacre, smothering his better half with kisses, clasped her in his arms and said, "My love, my love, one last farewell! Press your lips to mine—the ship is on fire!" I gathered from this that perhaps he felt the action of her lips in this manner might have some influence on the muddle we were in.

With a scream that woke the occupants of the cabins the frightened women rushed into the narrow passage way, Dacre standing with tears running down his chest as if he were playing the end of a drama very badly. Doors opened right and left, and in a second the truth was out. People hurried on their clothes, some took life-belts and put them over pyjamas or night-dresses, and ran on deck, expecting to see flames licking the funnel tops. The confusion was indescribable, and the shout of "Fire!" was echoed from one end of the ship to the other.

A clergyman, with his clerical collar hastily put over a red flannel nightshirt, held a service in the saloon, and at the top of his voice sang, "For those in peril on the sea." By the time the congregation had joined him in the hymn every one of them was so worked up that it would have only wanted a steward to have brought in a bunch of white flowers and the whole lot would have jumped into the sea, crying, "Dust to dust—ashes to ashes." One old maiden lady got up, and in her excitement took out a spirit lamp and curling irons, and began to adjust her transformation, or *toupé*, thinking,

no doubt, that in this way she would show a bold front.

Chart and I felt like taking Dacre and killing him for what he had done, but it was useless to discuss anything with him. I believe at that moment he was, poor fellow, as mad as he proved to be a year later, when he took his wife's life and committed suicide in Australia. The mischief was done! By one in the morning every first, second and third class passenger was fully dressed, and, indeed, many of them never took their clothes off again till they reached Queenstown five days later.

After some hours things quieted down a good deal. Dacre was, however, carefully stowed in an empty cabin; nothing else could stop him going about like a Welsh bard of old, telling tales to nervous old ladies of the founderings of great ships in wintry seas. The comic side of this at the time, oddly enough, did not present itself to any one of us.

I have been in a collision at sea, and that is an entertainment one does not particularly want to go out and borrow money to be present at again, but a fire as a travelling companion is worse than taking your mother-in-law on a honeymoon.

It was the greatest good fortune that the cotton burned itself slowly and slowly from the centre, and with the exception of seeing smoke coming through the hatchways at times, had Dacre not spoken every one on that trip would have travelled in blissful ignorance of the grave danger in their midst.

I did not go to bed during the whole trip, and used to keep myself awake at night by sitting and watching

the bell-register and notifying the stewards on duty what state-rooms were ringing for them. My fear must be forgiven me: I was only a boy, and it was the wonderful month of June. I have always hoped I shall not die in the beautiful summer time; a dull rainy day won't seem so bad, and leaving London in a November fog would make a new world, however uninviting, less terrible.

My poor little friend Deane died some two years afterwards. One morning at rehearsal he was doing his work as usual, and was talking and laughing, giving no signs whatever of being other than in his ordinary health. He came off from an entrance, and having a wait sat in a chair and lit a cigarette. Some time elapsed, when his turn to come on came again; the stage manager called to him but he took no notice. This struck me as odd, as he was a very precise little fellow in his business. He was called again, and still he did not move, so going up to him, I said: "I say, Deane, old man, they're calling you." But he didn't even look up. I touched him on the shoulder and said, "Deane!" He was sitting bolt upright in his chair stone dead, with a lighted cigarette smouldering in his hand. It was a tragic end and a great shock to everyone, but it was a merciful release, for the poor little man was ageing fast and rapidly falling on troublous times.

With the two vacations, these two seasons had taken up two whole years, and as the Kendals had booked a third tour in the States, and the *répertoire* was to be exactly the same, I decided, after long communing with myself, to leave the company and try and get an engagement in London. I accordingly wrote to my

friend Arthur Chudleigh, who by great good fortune wrote me that he would be able to offer me an engagement under his joint management with Mrs. John Wood at the new Court Theatre. When I told Mrs. Kendal I had settled by cable to join the Court Company, I think I may say she was sorry, as indeed was I, but I felt it best for my future. The round of parts I had played included old men, boys, and the juvenile lead in several plays, and it was a feather in Mrs. Kendal's teaching cap that when I left they had to engage three separate men to play the various *rôles* I had managed to perform.

I had during the second tour written my first play. It was a transpontine melodrama, entitled "This World of Ours." The plot turned on the loss of a marriage certificate, and save for the fact that when it was produced at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, for me by my friend Chart's kind mother, Miss Violet Vanbrugh and Miss Irene Vanbrugh played the principal parts in it, I don't think there is anything of interest to record. The piece was no good. I think it was conceived by a child of four to be seen through by a child of three. It only ran a week; but still, one mustn't grumble, for in the state of some of the London theatres to-day it makes me feel that a week's season is not to be wholly despised.

Sydney Fairbrother made her first appearance on that evening under my management, in a little play called "Auntie's Advice," which was the curtain-raiser, and it was on the production night of this great drama of mine that there came to my dressing-room a young man whose name was in everyone's mouth. It was

C. F. Gill, who had just saved some poor soul from hanging for the murder of her child under the stress of great trouble, in a manner so masterly that the world knew it had found a new man; and the world for once wasn't wrong.

Twenty odd years ago! How often since then have I watched that great cross-examiner and master of every trick in the judicial conjurer's box, whisper the hardened criminal into Portland, or taking off his pince-nez from the middle with his thumb and forefinger, smile at a jury and convey to them by his charm of manner that his client, the fair co-respondent, has overnight told him to let them know that each individual in that box and not any of the others, is the only man she is dying to meet in the private room of a Parisian restaurant when she leaves the court without a blot on her family escutcheon. The way he mentally caresses them is irresistible. Listen to him when he comes to the really weak point in a case—a point of which everyone has said the night before: "How is Charlie Gill going to get over that?" "How is he going to get over it? Why, he is going to Gill it." Which in plain English means that the soul of Gill takes a seat in the jury box, and linking arms with the baker, the grocer, and the candlestick maker, inquires tenderly after each of their children. To the bachelor among them he whispers, "Children, I loathe them! So do you, you really clever fellow." To that red-nosed, sleepy-eyed man who is polishing the oak panelling with the back of his head, he says, "Moet and Chandon 1900, Cliquot '94, my buck! and what of Warre's '87, the year after the phylloxera had been stamped out, eh, my genial

brother of the nuts and crackers?" and he's got him. To the young man at the far end of the back row, with a piece of blue ribbon in his buttonhole, Mr. Gill's soul whispers, "I am a teetotaller too." And what does he do to the one irreconcilable with a hard mouth and red whiskers, who looks at the advocate with a go-on-you-can't-get-over-me—I-know-all-about-it, kind of air. Why, the spirit whispers: "Of course I can't. You and I are the only two really clever people here to-day. It would be idle for me to insult your intelligence by labouring a point of this kind, the contention is so absolutely ridiculous. You and I know that, don't we; but the others don't, you—you clever, brilliant grocer," and the tradesman takes the sugar and leaves the sand, and the heroine of the Hotel Don'telle leaves the court with a rider from the jury, "that she has done absolutely nothing extremely well!"

Oh, Mr. Gill! my admiration is only equalled by my personal affection for you. But at night you haunt me sometimes. One of my nightmares is that I am standing before you and listening to you, saying, as you punctuate each word with a twitching forefinger, which, signpost like, conveys to me that "all roads lead to Wormwood Scrubbs": "You don't appreciate the question—er—er—I want to put it to you, and I know you will tell the gentlemen of the jury—er—now just think a moment—er—er—you say you didn't murder the—lady—but—er—just let me understand. Did you do it with a hammer or an axe?"

In the middle of the night I hear myself indignantly declare my innocence. I hear a judge, the drum of whose ear would not be good enough for a Salvation

Army band, bend over to you and inquire what my answer has been, and I see your upturned boyish, guileless face, smiling and whispering to the judge, so that no one else can hear: "He says—he says, my lord—he did it with a hammer!"

It was Charles Gill who left a lasting mark on a well-known and sporting-looking actor by describing him in one short sentence. The actor in question had a strong clean-shaven face with a square jaw and a powerful neck. A lady, in discussing him one evening at dinner, said to the learned K.C.: "I think Mr. So-and-so is such a charming man, don't you, Mr. Gill?" "Yes," came the answer, "I do; but I never knew what the criminal classes really looked like till I saw him asleep in a third-class railway carriage." With the most profound respect I take off my make-up to you, kind friend of twenty years!

One of my chief recreations is attending the Law Courts and listening to the battle of the strong. I have seen nearly every famous trial of late years at the Old Bailey, that mighty human drama house where they produce pieces in which the comedy parts are few and there is seldom a hero to emerge triumphant. Personally, I would rather there were no prisoner in the dock and the case being argued was merely a hypothetical one. For the pity every decent man should feel for those in trouble sits heavy on me when I see a fellow in such desperate straits facing a sphinx in scarlet, to whom the community has given the power of taking away God's greatest gift—liberty and the open air. The new Old Bailey doesn't inspire me with the same awe that the old Old Bailey used to. It is too much

like the Ritz Hotel, the hardened ruffian in the dock looking quite out of place and very like a dead rat laid out for inspection on a length of priceless silk. The look of surprise on the old lag's face who has never been amidst the new Old Bailey's oak and green leather upholstery before, is strange to watch. He always looks as if he was going to say to the warder at his side, "'Ere, cully, 'aven't you brought me to the wrong place?" Personally, if ever I had the misfortune to find myself in so gorgeous a place as the dock of the new Old Bailey, I should feel I ought to call for a wine list, tip the policeman, and invite that shrewdest of solicitors, Mr. Under-sheriff Langton—or, as Arthur Roberts called him, "Undersheriff and Bitters"—to lunch. There is a tremendous echo in one of the courts, and the first sentence I heard my favourite judge, Sir Charles Darling, pass there of six months, was repeated from wall to wall, his lordship saying "Six months," the walls saying "Six months—six months," and the prisoner at the Bar shouting out, "'Eavens, my lord, *eighteen* months!"

It was at the Old Bailey after hearing my friend Mr. Marshall Hall, the eminent K.C., make an exceptionally telling speech, that I turned to a newspaper shorthand reporter whom I happened to be near, and said, "Fine, wasn't he? What do you think of him?" The reporter, without looking up from his labour, simply replied, "What do I think of 'All? 192 words a minute, that's what I think of him!"

I forgot to mention that the reason I commenced to write plays was because I wanted to get paragraphs in the papers about myself for nothing. I had little hope

of ever having a piece produced when I started, but I had hopes of saving half-a-crown a week. In the first desire I was, I am glad to say, wrong. I have just produced my thirty-third play. In saying this, do not think I presume to call myself a dramatist; I think there are only about seven in Great Britain, and I know I'm not one of them. I am only an ordinary dramatic carpenter. But I'm not sure I wouldn't be a humble nailer together of unconsidered trifles rather than write the play of supposed subtle thought in which everything that is said means something else, only the initiated knowing that if a general in the army remarks, "The guns are booming," it means, "My wife has overdrawn her account."

It has been, and always will be, a mystery to me why the Press spasmodically hail some writer as a new-found genius simply because he is undramatic, ignores situations, finishes a third act with a child asking his father whether he was found under a gooseberry bush, and peppers the play with such lines as—"Is it dark to-night? The night *is* dark. How dark? As dark may be, but dark!! Dark as may be, but dark? That's what I say, the night is dark. Oh! dark."

But I have wandered away again.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHNNY TOOLE

I HAD left the Kendals and started at the Court. The opening play was a piece called "Pamela's Prodigy," laid in an early Victorian setting by the late Clyde Fitch. The one laugh of the evening was Mrs. John Wood's pantalettes that showed boldly under a crinoline. We rehearsed six weeks, had four dress rehearsals, and the play ran five nights.

A very funny farce called "Aunt Jack" was revived and ran a few weeks. I played an old colonel in it, and had the great delight of appearing for the second time with that inimitable lady Mrs. John Wood. What an artiste—what a low comedian in petticoats!

I left one great actress to work with another. Somehow, however, things didn't run very smoothly at the Court, and my friend Chudleigh and Mrs. Wood, differing as to policy, agreed to separate, and I was now landed without work. But it was only for a moment.

I heard Willie Edouin was producing a play called "The Sleepwalker" at the old Strand Theatre and wanted a man to play a twin with Harry Eversfield, a then well-known eccentric light comedian. I went to the theatre, saw Edouin and got the part. We produced two nights after the Court Theatre closed, and I never heard greater laughter in a theatre. But alas! the piece was a failure and withdrawn within the month.

And then came the real turning-point in my career.

I joined J. L. Toole, at Toole's Theatre, in J. M. Barrie's first play, and had the good luck to make a success. From then till now, although of course I have had plenty of reverses, I have never known anything but the refusal of, not the seeking for, work.

The first letter I had ever received from an actor was from J. L. Toole. I had written to him secretly when I was a schoolboy asking him for advice as to how to go on the stage, and he had replied very kindly, telling me I had better go to a theatrical agent and learn my business in the provinces. So I hurried to Toole's Theatre in fear and trembling lest the vacancy I was applying for should be filled.

Toole's Theatre at that time was a quaint little band-box and stood on part of the site of Charing Cross Hospital, its front portico being on the spot where the new out-patients' entrance of the hospital now is. The theatre only held some £129 when full, and it seldom was full; for Toole made all his money in the country, and troubled little to produce anything new in London, relying on all his old favourites, such as "Uncle Dick's Darling," "The Upper Crust," "The Serious Family," "Dot," etc., for his short London seasons; but he had played these so often that they drew very little money, and indeed they had become very like the song of "The Wolf." This had been sung so often by some noted singer, that on one occasion when it was announced a voice in the gallery shouted: "Oh! go on, guv'nor, give the wolf a chance; you've sung every hair off the blooming animal's back."

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, when a new modern play was put into rehearsal by a Scotch novelist

whose "Window in Thrums" was the great literary hit of the year, that there was considerable excitement in the Tooleries.

I presented myself at the stage door and anxiously inquired for Mr. Toole, saying I had come on important business. I was shown down on to the stage, and was told that Mr. Toole was not there yet, but I could see the stage-manager, Mr. John Billington. I explained that I had heard that a young man part was still unfilled, and offered myself, explaining my few qualifications.

Billington, who was by no means a genial man and who abhorred, as I afterwards discovered, the young actor, told me I had better go and show myself to the author, Mr. J. M. Barrie, who lived at an address off Oxford Street. In a twinkling I was in a cab, and in five minutes I was ringing at the door of Mr. Barrie's lodgings. It was opened by the landlady, who told me Mr. Barrie was in but would not see anyone. I sent up a message that I had come from the theatre. She returned saying that Mr. Barrie would be there during the afternoon. I replied the matter was too urgent to keep till the afternoon, that I must give him the message at once.

I waited in the passage with a beating heart. I can see the wall-paper now: it was a light yellow speckled production—supposed to represent marble, but wouldn't have deceived the veriest amateur in Roman quarrying into the belief that it was that precious stone. It, however, was a very general and favourite ornamentation for lath and plaster, just prior to the early Oetzmann Renaissance. I had not long to wait. My message must have conveyed forebodings of disaster to Mr.

Barrie's mind, for though unwilling to allow me upstairs, he came down into the hallway and asked me in quiet unimpassioned Scotch accents what it was I wanted.

I told him that I had been sent to him on appro. for the part of Andrew McPhail, the medical student, in his play, and if I could obtain his permission I should be allowed to read the part. He said that he saw no objection to my reading it—as no one had ever been able to spoil a part by so doing, and I certainly could go and try, and he would see me later in the afternoon.

I returned to the theatre post-haste and told Billington that the author was much relieved that I had been found, that I embodied all his ideas of what a medical student should be, and that I was to have the part given me at once as he would be coming down later specially to see me. As it turned out, the part was an excellent one and by no means complex or difficult, requiring only an abundance of vitality, youth and some experience. I rehearsed steadily for some hours, and when the author did arrive he very kindly said I would do, and I signed with Mr. Toole for the run of the play at a salary of £8 a week—a very large salary for Mr. Toole to pay, especially to a newcomer; but there had been great difficulty in casting the character, and I suppose as the production was near at hand they were past haggling.

The rehearsals were the strangest I ever attended—everyone seemed to do much as he liked; the stage management was primitive in the extreme and very different from the Kendal *régime*. Billington, who was supposed to be the producer, looked on with good-humoured contempt at the making of this modern play, feeling certain that a few nights after its production he

would be appearing in the time-honoured *répertoire* he knew backwards.

Mr. Barrie, whose power of expression in stage technique in those days was extremely limited, walked about with the prompt copy of the play—which consisted of dozens of sheets of single note-paper covered with tiny writing—seemingly unable to cope with the extraordinary lack of law, order or discipline which was the little theatre's most striking feature. The piece was called "Walker, London," and was produced eventually in face of many difficulties, not the least of which was that Mr. Toole did not know his part, and indeed was still imperfect when the piece was withdrawn after about 600 performances.

Being but a lad I had no right to think anything, but I'm bound to say I did feel at rehearsals that the piece was no good at all. It seemed so light and trivial and about so little that I did not see how it could succeed. But I may be excused my bad judgment, for it was the first of the Barrie novelties—the forerunner of an army of successes; and it would have taken a much cleverer man than I am to have been able to see at a glance the hand of the man who may to-day change his name to J. M. Genius without bothering about deed-poll.

The first night was a *furore*. All the parts in the play were good, and everyone made a success, and I hope I shall not be thought lacking in modesty if I say I too had a little triumph of my own. I think J. M. Barrie must have known I was somewhat pleased with myself over my notices, which were extraordinarily good, for he very quietly scored off me one evening and took me down several pegs—in three or four words. He was

strolling about the theatre, and seeing me said "Oh! Hicks, do you play cricket?" I said "Yes, I do, Mr. Barrie." "Well, will you come down to Sandwich and play against the fire brigade men for me?" he inquired. I said I should be delighted, but it would be impossible, as I should be unable to get back to London in time to act at night. "Oh, don't bother about that," said he; "you can put on the understudy." He smiled, and I knew that he knew that I knew.

How little I thought when on joining that company I was to have two such happy years. Dear Irene Vanbrugh was the leading lady, and I never saw her act that I was not certain in my mind that she would take a great position, which I rejoice to say she has—to the delight of her thousand admirers.

C. M. Lowne, who is one of my oldest and best friends, has reached a position of which he may well be proud, and George Shelton and Eliza Johnson and Mary Ansell were all of the company—and last, but how far from least! that personality of personalities, John Laurence Toole.

I saw him act only when he was a very old gentleman, and I must confess frankly he never made me smile on the stage at all; he was over sixty, his methods of raising laughter had become mechanical, and he was only the shadow of the great comedian I know he must have been in the days of Paul Bedford and Madame Vestris. But off the stage what a humorist—what a companion—what, if one may use the expression of a man, what a dear! From early morning till late at night he saw the fun of everything; nothing escaped his notice; there never was a man who could put

his finger with such unerring accuracy on the little weaknesses and vanities of those around him and turn them to such humorous account; but though this was the case, never during the whole time that I had the honour and delight of his friendship did I ever see him get a laugh at anyone's expense or say one unkind word to hurt another's feelings.

Very small of stature, with a regular low comedian's face, he attracted attention wherever he went—the few who didn't know him inquiring who he was at once. He had the most beautiful eyes, which twinkled so continuously that whenever I look up into the sky on a very brilliant summer's night and two stars are more than usually active I feel sure they are the windows of the soul of that big-hearted great little comedian laughing at me still.

I remember having had my attention drawn, I forget now by whom, to the fact that nearly all good, or shall I say well-known, comedians have beautiful eyes. Certain it is that nearly every actor of note has either very striking eyes or very beautiful ones. The eyes of J. L. Toole, David James, John Hare and Arthur Roberts are all beautiful and singularly alike. Indeed, the first three named had the same mould of countenance altogether, with a smile in each case that was as fascinating as it was sympathetic and kindly. And that wonderful Fred Leslie! His great dark eyes shone like mighty lamps that had unsurpassed intelligence for their wick and genius for their oil. When one thinks of what he was—what a second-rate crew all we musical comedy comedians are to-day, compared with him! I do not advise ladies to walk about looking into

comedians' eyes, as many comedians are fascinating fellows, but it is worth while just for amusement's sake noting how nearly all prominent actors have beauty of no small extent in their orbs.

Johnny Toole, as all who knew him called him, hated being alone, or anywhere where things were dull; he always took four or five of us to dinner and supper, and sat up so late at the latter meal that he himself said he had been to bed so little in his life, that at sixty his real age was 120. Even in a cab he made the driver keep in brightly lighted thoroughfares and out of the byways.

It would be useless to try and relate one half of the amusing stories told of him. The millions of anecdotes with which his name is associated have been set down in his "Recollections," and the others that have not are household words. Nearly everything is lost in the telling of a Toole story unless the reader knew Toole personally, as it is impossible to show on paper his method of galvanising into laughter the most commonplace circumstances. All his humour was simple. For instance, nothing delighted him more than to ask a policeman a multitude of questions and then press a penny into his hand, and hurry away. He always returned to make the penny a florin, but he loved to see the policeman's bewilderment at receiving a copper for all his trouble. The delight he would get at Margate or Brighton on a Sunday in going from house to house and ringing the bell to inquire if the servant could oblige him by telling him where he could get "a bit of groundsel for a sick bird" was immense.

The picture was amusing in the extreme. This little man, with silver hair and his lame leg, looking the very

picture of respectability, inquiring for the groundsel as if his life depended on it, and discussing with the different kinds of lodging-house maids his chances of obtaining it at Mrs. Jones's down the street, and the conversation broadening out into an inquiry of Mrs. Jones and the little Joneses, would often lead to discussions as to the pleasure of donkey rides and sailing trips on bank holiday, and wonderings as to the kind of man the girl ought to choose for a husband.

Of course, there were many occasions when the landlady would slam the door in his face, telling him to go and drown the bird and eat the groundsel, but not often. The variety of his receptions was what gave him the greatest pleasure—he was never at a loss, and could cope with nearly anyone; his serious manner and benevolent appearance disarmed most of the people he approached in the street with ridiculous questions, which was one of his chief amusements. If ever he saw a tradesman standing at his shop door he would say, "Good morning, Mr. So-and-so." The man, delighted at his name being known, would smilingly reply, "Very well, thank you, sir." "And the dear wife?" Toole would inquire. "Very well, sir, too, I thank you." "And the children?" Then a long dissertation on the family would begin, Toole taking the wildest interest in Tom's foot and Alice's hair, etc., etc., and asking the man all sorts of strange things which were generally answered quite seriously. Toole would walk away, and the man, wondering how the old gentlemen knew who he was, never realised that over his shop door was "Charles Osgood," or whatever his name was, painted as large as life.

Another thing he loved doing was to go up to the cashier's window of a big bank and, putting his stick and watch through the pigeon-hole, say in his husky and merry voice, "How much can you let me have on these till Monday?" The cashier would explain politely that it was not a pawnshop, but Toole would pretend to be deaf and unable to understand—and would argue and argue, and offer more things as pledges until a row would commence. Just as the crucial moment arrived, and he looked like being thrown out forcibly, he would hand a big bank-note or a cheque through the window, and say, "Well, what about this?"

I remember being in the City with him once when he went into the General Post Office and asked for a penny stamp. The clerk brought out a huge sheet, and Toole said, "I want that one." "Which one?" said the clerk. "That one," said Toole, pointing to the centre one. A long argument ensued, Toole saying that in purchasing a stamp he had a perfect right in law to choose the one he fancied, and so emphatic was he on the point that he had his way, but not before he had created a disturbance and clerks from other counters had left their work to see what was going on.

He always, at the end of an adventure, gave the people he had his fun with seats for the theatre, or a present of some kind, and everybody loved him. His memory for names, except those of his intimates, was appallingly bad, but he always pretended he knew, and would never own that he didn't recollect everything about everybody.

One day a young man walked up to him, when we were strolling along the front at Brighton and, raising

his hat, said, "Ah, Mr. Toole, how are you?" "Ah," said Toole, "how are you, my dear boy—how are you?" most effusively; but the young man saw something in Toole's eye that told him he was not really remembered, and said, "You recollect me, don't you, Mr. Toole?" "Course I do—course I do, my boy," he answered. "You remember my mother?" "Course I do," said Toole. How's your father?" "No, no. 'My Mother' was the name of the farce I wrote for you." "Oh, by gad! was it?" said Toole; "that's different, isn't it? Good-day, my boy," and hobbled off laughing at being caught.

I heard an actor in his presence once boasting of his various performances, and at last, getting a little too fond of himself, he said, "Yes, Mr. Toole, I have played Hamlet fifty-seven times." "Ah," said Toole; "but how?"—which made everybody laugh but the boastful Dane.

It was through going about with Toole that I first began to meet celebrities of all kinds: Henry Irving, Lord Tennyson, George Meredith, Oscar Wilde, and a host of people too numerous to mention. Toole not only seemed to know every man in the street, but was on a Christian-name acquaintance with half the wives of England and certainly all their children. If he walked anywhere it was a very difficult thing to get along, as he was being stopped every moment by admirers whom he always pretended to remember.

I was walking along with him one day at Brighton, in company with Comyns Carr (that wittiest of mortals and brilliant after-dinner speaker, who has said more good things about bad men than anyone living), when

we were stopped by an austere-looking divine in a shovel hat, who told us he was at Brighton for his health, but hoped to see Mr. Toole when next he was up north. "Of course," said Toole, as usual; "I shall go up north specially to see you." The clergyman bowed and went away delighted. "Who was that?" said Comyns Carr. "I don't know," said Toole; "he's here for his health. I think he's a sick bishop." "Is he?" said Carr; "I thought he was a Rotting dean," which for quickness wants some beating. But if you are out with Carr long and listen to his conversation, you feel you are attending a veritable Brocks' Benefit of fireworks—in fact, most of the men I know, myself included, dine out on his stories, and I have often been asked to the same house twice through not having acknowledged him as the author of something that has gone particularly well. This always involved finding Carr in the intervals to get something fresh to go to market with a second time. It is a million pities he has not written one-tenth of what he has said; we should all be richer.

I well remember poor Herman Merivale, who about the time of the production of his "White Pilgrim" became very strange in his manner, though no one realised he was going off his head—kneeling down in a public dining-room and beginning to recite the Lord's Prayer. Carr who was next him, said "Look out, Merivale, the Author is present," which had the effect of presenting to Merivale a good reason for a literary man to discontinue his recital. Had he been spoken to in any other way, he might have become extremely violent, as, sad to relate, he did subsequently on many occasions.

My time at Toole's Theatre was a very, very happy one. The company had nearly all been with the old man for years and years—in fact, those who had joined to play the juveniles in the seventies, still continued to do so with bald heads in the nineties. I think Toole would have rather closed the house than have taken an old friend out of a young part. What hours he used to keep, though! He could not go to bed. I have sat up with him at a famous club six times a week till five every morning month in, month out. I always sleep in the afternoon now to try and steal back those hours of repose lost when I was a young man. How he used to do it, Heaven knows; I can only put it down to the fact that he never smoked at all and drank next to nothing.

One really amusing though extremely embarrassing episode took place at a supper party given by Toole to Irving and a few friends in a private room at the Garrick Club many years ago. Toole had on a visit with him an old friend from Glasgow who had been with him for a fortnight seeing London. He had been made, quite good-naturedly, a butt of by his host for many practical jokes. The Scotchman was leaving the next day for the north, thoroughly tired out with the festivities, and rather irritable at never knowing what to believe, Toole having teased him unmercifully. He was on this occasion a little elated and inclined to be argumentative, combating everyone's assertions as if the whole room were trying to pull his leg. Supper was just over, when suddenly at about one in the morning the doors were thrown open and a footman announced: "His Royal Highness the Prince of

Wales." Everyone rose to his feet, and the Prince entered, saying: "Ah! Mr. Toole, I heard you were giving a supper party; I should like to smoke a cigar with you." It was by no means uncommon in those days for the late King to pay a surprise visit to a favourite club and join a member he happened to like, particularly if he were in a private room. The Prince sat down on Toole's right, the comedian having on his left his Scotch visitor, who eyed the Prince suspiciously in silence for some time, and then to everyone's horror suddenly pointed to H.R.H. saying: "Who's he?" He was hushed down, told it was the Prince and requested to behave himself. But he would not have this at all. "Oh!" said the Scotchman, "I've had enough of your infernal jokes all the week, and this is the last I stand for. He's not a Prince," he called out, pointing at the distinguished guest; "you can't bamboozle me. He's not any Prince of Wales!" and it was with the greatest difficulty he was kept from getting into a personal argument with His Royal Highness, who at last, noticing his strange behaviour, inquired of Toole who the wrangling gentleman was whose face he did not know, though he was familiar with everyone else at the table. Seeing that matters might become difficult, the whole circumstances as to the Scotsman's fortnight, in which he had been the victim of practical jokes, were told, and the Prince was the first to see the humour of the situation; he was immensely amused, and on leaving the room gave a cigar to the Scotchman, who took it with a leery look in his eye, and I don't believe ever was certain that it really was his future King who was the donor.

CHAPTER IX

THERE WERE GIANTS IN THOSE DAYS

"WALKER, LONDON," was played for some six hundred performances, a phenomenal run at any time, but at our little theatre no words could describe the wonder at the play's success.

I had not been at the theatre very long before I found myself continually in Mr. Toole's company and receiving innumerable kindnesses from him. He repeatedly took me home to stay with him at his house in Maida Vale, and nearly every night he invited me to supper at the Garrick Club, where I had the good fortune to see all the celebrities of the day. Being young and of no account, I was able to sit unnoticed in the corner and listen to all the giants—many, alas! of whom are now in a far removed spot looking down, let us hope, on their various professions.

We used, as I have mentioned, to burn daylight in these early nineties, seldom breaking up till five in the morning, our old chief being always the youngest and the liveliest of the party.

It was early in the run of "Walker" that I was presented to Henry Irving by the comedian who loved him so dearly. It would be an impertinence for me to dare to set down even superlatives in praise of so great a man, but it would be impossible to scribble these memories without including in them a very

reverent thought of the greatest actor I have seen or shall ever see.

The first time I met him I was awed and almost frightened in his presence. His personality was so tremendous that it swallowed up all it came in contact with, and I have watched him in remarkable company. There never was an effort on the part of this wonderful person to impress himself on an assembly: his extraordinary magnetism made itself felt even as he opened the door of the room he entered. I can say without exaggeration that had I sat with my back to that door, I should have become conscious of the arrival of someone unusual, and am sure I should have turned to find it—Henry Irving, whom in life I worshipped and who, in fact, is alive to me to-day.

What a wonderful face he had! Lit often by a smile that many a beautiful woman might well have envied. Pages could I write of my thoughts of him, but it would be useless for my poor pen to attempt a portrait of this prince of my profession; enough that he was a great gentleman, gracious to the lowly as well as to the high, and that through a long life he gave his money broadcast to alleviate the suffering of others not only in his own calling but out of it. It was not for any one quality, but for a multitude of them, that he was loved by his fellows, as it falls to the lot of few men to be loved. Both his sons, Harry and Laurence, I have known and been fond of for many, many years, and it is small wonder that I delight to see the splendid position H. B., as he is familiarly known to his intimates, has made for himself by his hard work and great talents, or that I rejoice to know how well

Laurence is doing wherever he goes. Laurence collaborated with me in the dramatisation of Le Fanu's book "Uncle Silas," parts of which, like the curate's egg, were excellent—the main theme, owing to its gruesomeness, alone standing in the way of the dramatic version being a financial success.

He was at Toole's Theatre when we were writing it, and many were the nights we sat up working with an enthusiasm that I am proud to say neither of us has lost to-day. We called the play "Uncle Silas," and it was produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre at a *matinée*, and witnessed by almost every member of the theatrical profession in London, great and small. Napoleon's Balcony of Kings was not in it with our audience. The whole front page of the *Era* occupied the stalls, while the boxes were filled by Irvings, Terrys, Forbes Robertsons, Barretts, Bancrofts, etc., a cast which would have, had we been able to engage them, taxed the salary list to the extent of, about £1,000 an hour.

It was after this performance that Henry Irving asked me to come to supper at the Garrick Club. I don't remember, ever before or since, feeling so excited or elated. I came early, and found myself alone with the mighty tragedian waiting for Mr. Toole to arrive, and he talked away to me for nearly half an hour, every word he said being treasured up by me, knowing as I did that I was hearing what I could make history of. I remember he told me that the greatest actor he had ever seen in his life was Samuel Phelps.

I have heard it said that Henry Irving never saw Phelps act, but I had it from him first hand that he

did. On that evening, too, he spoke of Robson. He said, "Yes, Robson—er—Robson—a good actor, but not great—no, not great—yes, yes, he was great! He was great enough to know that he could be only great for three minutes! The stuff they talk about his being able to have played tragedy, had he wanted to, is wrong. Three minutes of it—yes—but the whole evening—oh, dear no!"

When Henry Irving spoke, he did so in telegrams, if one can describe it so. He paused, looked (*and what a look!*), nodded his head, and out came the remark, like a bullet striking a bull's-eye at Bisley. He said to me also on that night: "I modelled myself originally on Mathews—Mathews modelled himself—on Le Blanc, the French pantomimist. I have a print of him that Mathews gave me—a graceful fellow!" And oddly enough, among a lot of small pictures at the Irving sale, I missed buying what I should have loved to have obtained—a small print of Le Blanc that used to hang in Henry Irving's bedroom. It possessed a special interest to me after hearing the above words fall from his lips, and I often regret it is not mine.

They say Edmund Kean told his wife, after his performance of Richard III., that during the last act he could not feel the stage beneath him. During my conversation with Henry Irving I am sure I did not feel the chair under me, or know whether I was on my head or my heels. As has been mentioned before in these pages, he could never resist taking a gently sarcastic rise out of anyone, if he felt he'd like to, and on this night he, in wishing most kindly to advise me as to my future, led me on by praise to heights of dizziness, and

then dashed me into the boneyard with a short sentence. He was telling me how he had enjoyed the afternoon performance, in his sudden and staccato way, and ended after being eulogistic to a degree, with "I liked your acting, my boy." I had played a rough character part of a cruel, badly-brought-up youth, who ill-treated animals, and who ultimately killed his own father. "Yes," he said, "I liked your work. It was strong, it was natural, it was good—um, yes, good, powerful. You held the audience in the big scenes; you held them, my boy, in your hand, by your rugged strength." "Did I, sir?" I ventured; "I am proud you think so." "Yes," he said, "I do, I do; *but light comedy is your game. I shouldn't annoy them with the other stuff if I were you!*" I felt as if I could have sunk through the floor, but he patted me on the shoulder and said, with his wonderful smile, "Never mind about that; you'll be all right if you stick to it. Where's our old friend Toole?" which name he generally pronounced as "Too-oo-oole."

Many years afterwards Henry Irving saw me in a French farce, and when the curtain fell said, "Well, you're at the comedy game, I see, eh? Do you know you remind me of Charles Mathews; very like him, very." "I'm so glad," I replied. "Yes," he said, "you wear the same sort of collars." But I didn't mind what he said; I was only too proud to be spoken to by him.

Once I remember a memorable three days spent in his company with Mr. Toole, that ended up at Boxhill, where I was taken and introduced to George Meredith. I went to see Henry Irving play "King Lear" on a

Friday evening and supped with him afterwards, the party breaking up at four in the morning. The next day I saw him play "The Bells" and "Jingle" at a *matinée* and "Lear" at night, after which we supped again, and I finished the night sitting with the great actor on the end of Mr. Toole's bed in Maida Vale at eight in the morning. When we parted he said to Toole, "Don't be late, Johnny; the train goes at *one*, you know." And at one that Sunday afternoon, after only three or four hours' rest, the then Mr. Pinero, Shelton, Toole, Henry Irving, and my humble self were on our way to the Stag's Head, Boxhill, where we were to dine, after having called at the home of one of the wonders of the Victorian era. I don't remember much of what was said by Meredith, as I naturally kept in the background; but one thing has lived in my memory that fell from the great novelist. Henry Irving was discussing the condition of the stage and the lack of rising actresses with Meredith. "Ah! my dear Irving," said he, as he shook hands in parting, "we have no young actresses now; they are all vulgar young women who laugh from their stomachs."

We dined that night off all that Boxhill could provide, Fussy, Irving's favourite fox terrier, sharing our fare; and we drank Waterloo port at 36*s.* a bottle—we, I well remember, returning to town by a train which left Boxhill at 10.30. While waiting for it on the platform a party of young idiots bent on mischief began patrolling the station, annoying everyone; and seeing Mr. Irving and not recognising him, had the insolence to pass and repass him, singing, "Get your hair cut." This was a popular song of the day, and the actor, as everyone

knows, grew his hair very long. He puffed his cigar and got more angry every time they repeated their vulgarity. I begged to be allowed to strike the most sizable, but he held my arm and called to them himself. "Hi!" he cried; "you—you—come here." As if unable to disobey, one of the yahoos came at his bidding and said, "What is it?" Irving, white with rage, said, "Get your hair cut is it, eh? Get your hair cut?" "That's the tune," blurted out the idiot. "Is it; then *you* get your tongue cut!" "And you," he called to another of them, "come here." He obeyed likewise. "Come here; tell me, what time does the next train go to London?" "Ten-thirty," said the youth. "Yes, I knew that, you jackass." That night Henry Irving bit his words at them, and looked as terrifying as I had ever seen him appear on the stage.

Talking of the delight Henry Irving always took in slyly tapping the object of his praise gently on the shoulder, I saw him do this—it must have been with humorous intention—on the occasion when he had to propose the health of Mr. Nat Goodwin at a public banquet. This he did much in the following way:—

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, it is my pleasure and privilege to ask you to drink the health of a very distinguished and famous gentleman who honours us with his presence here to-night. America knows him, we know him, the world knows him. His name is one that we all envy—a name that men think of, women speak of, and children *lisp*. It is a name, ladies and gentlemen, that few people in this great universe are not acquainted with. It is a mascot in our art—a household word in all countries. Ladies and gentlemen,

when I ask you to raise your glasses, need I say it is to the name of that famous American comedian, *Mr. Nit Godwin.*"

No one laughed more heartily than Nat Goodwin at what appeared a mistake, and after the laughter had subsided no one cheered more loudly than did his English hosts, who knew and appreciated what a fine actor he was.

Few people could tell a comedy story better than Henry Irving could, or see the humour of a situation more quickly than he. It is told of him that for one of his productions he required a horse to ride, and sent to Messrs. Hale and Sons, who supply actors with horses which are trained not to take advantage of the performers' steeplechasing qualities. Hale, on receiving his instructions, brought down a white horse, a seasoned veteran. On being shown the animal, Irving said to Hale, "Quiet, is it, eh? No tricks, no jumping into the big drum, or anything of that kind, eh?" "Oh, dear, no!" said Hale; "very quiet, sir, and knows his stage business well. He carried Mr. Beerbohm Tree all last season." "Ah! did he?" said Irving; "did he?" At this moment the horse opened his mouth and yawned, which Irving noticing, said, "Ah! a bit of a critic, too, I see! Eh?"

Horses remind me of a tragic incident that occurred about this time to me. I was living at Challis's Hotel (the site of which I afterwards bought to build a theatre upon but where now stands one of Lyons and Co.'s famous houses), and at breakfast time one morning I was beckoned to by one of the Loates'—Sammy or Tommy, I forget which—who had been often very

obliging in telling me on what horses he thought I might with safety invest my odd five-shilling pieces. "Would you like to make a little money to-day, Mr. Hicks?" said Loates. "I should indeed," I replied. "Well, to-day is the Lincoln handicap—back Sir Blundell Maple's 'Clarence' he said, "and the horse I am riding, Bullion—well, back that for a place. Clarence is sure to win, and will start at a good price." I thanked the famous jockey profusely, and immediately sought one of the head waiters who had been putting on my money for me with his bookmaker for the best part of a year—not, however, I am bound to say, with any great advantage to myself. I told him that I wanted to invest ten pounds each way on Clarence and ten pounds on Bullion for a place. He told me that would be quite all right, and that he would put the money on for me as usual.

Ten pounds each way! This was a tremendous dash for me, in those days. I knew that if it lost I should have to borrow my next week's salary in advance, and it was with trembling hands I put on my make-up that afternoon at Toole's. It was a Tuesday, and we were playing a *matinée*. During the second act I heard the voices of the newsboys coming through the open vestibule shouting, 'Winner—Winner—Winner of the Lincoln Handicap." I was in a fever, for I could not leave the stage to hear the result. The curtain fell, and I rushed to the side where my dresser was standing with a paper. He handed it to me, and I read: "*Clarence* first, *Bullion* second." I think I must have turned green with excitement. I added up my winnings, and found that I had made somewhere between £90

and £100. I had never seen so much money, and I could hardly believe that it was all true—£100!

The first thing I did was to ask the entire company to dinner between the performances, and all the friends they happened to have with them in their dressing-rooms at the time. At six o'clock about thirty guests sat down in one of Challis's big rooms. Champagne flowed; toasts were given; Blundell Maple's health, coupled with that of Loates and a suite of bedroom furniture, was drunk repeatedly, and all was merry as a marriage bell; when the waiter to whom I had given the commission leant over my chair and whispered suavely: "Sir, I'm very sorry, but I quite forgot to tell you my bookmaker was away to-day and I could not get your money on Clarence and Bullion." The room swam round—the champagne ceased to sparkle—and the cigar I smoked went out. Need I say what I felt like. I had to go to Mr. Challis and explain the whole situation; he was one of the kindest of men, and told me not to be worried, it would be all right about the dinner. He discharged the waiter on the spot without giving him time to change his clothes, and I played the medical student that evening more like a patient who had just been operated on than a doctor. I left the racing world for some time after this, and in fact have had very little to do with it ever since, my bets seldom exceeding a modest sovereign or two.

I did buy a racehorse once, though, but that was more by accident than design. It was at a Windsor meeting—I had been watching a selling race—and when the numbers went up I went in to see the winner sold. One hundred and eighty guineas was bid for it;

the second fetched about £90, and the third horse, a big upstanding chestnut called Royal Tartan, was then put under the hammer. "How much shall I say," said the auctioneer, "for Royal Tartan?" A bid of nine guineas was made. Nine guineas? I thought they must be mad. What an insult to this noble beast! Nine guineas!

The veins standing out on his quivering flesh and the tremor that went through his whole body made me think Royal Tartan was conscious of the indignity put upon him. I felt for the gallant thoroughbred, and promptly said: "Ten guineas"; someone near me said eleven—I said twelve. The auctioneer said: "Twelve—any advance on twelve?—no advance on twelve? Yours, sir," pointing at me. "Name?" I had bought Royal Tartan. I bleated out my name. "Where would you like it sent to?" I was asked. "Where would I like it sent to? I didn't dare say. I didn't think my bedroom in Shaftesbury Avenue was big enough for it, and in despair I turned to Mr. Peck, the well-known trainer, whom luckily I knew slightly. I told him that having seen the other two horses go into the hundreds, I thought the third would do likewise, and I had said the magic word "twelve" more out of kindness to the animal and with the hope of sparing its feelings than anything else. I told him that I had nowhere to keep it—as they didn't allow dogs or horses in theatre dressing-rooms, and could he possibly get me out of the muddle.

Royal Tartan meanwhile was snorting in my ear, and I don't think I ever took such a dislike to anything for a few moments as I did to this satin-coated delusion.

Mr. Peck spoke to the man who had bid eleven

guineas, and he offered to take the animal off me if I gave him £2—one for the deal, the other for the extra bid. This I readily agreed to. I had been an owner for five minutes for forty shillings, which, working out as it did at 6*s*. a minute, seems remarkably cheap, knowing what I do now of the cost of keeping candidates for the sport of kings.

I understood from Mr. Peck that the reason the horse had gone so cheap was that it was unsound, having, I believe, a trick of staggering home from its club in the morning, and a predilection to pneumonia in the ankles. I may be wrong technically as to its diseases, but as I am not horsey except where my voice is concerned, I beg to be forgiven my poor description of Royal Tartan's shortcomings.

I first met Oscar Wilde in these days. Generous to a fault, witty past belief, and kind-hearted beyond words —my memories of him are of the most pleasant and entertaining. What happened in the years that followed, when his friends and admirers saw with the greatest pain the downfall of a man of genius, is not for me to write of or to criticise. We all have our faults, and as the Rev. Bernard Vaughan once said to me: "Don't let us ever blame anyone for what they do, but instead kneel down and thank God that it is only through His goodness we are free from the things we would condemn in others." Oscar Wilde had to pay for the perversion of his genius in bitter agony and bloody sweat. I knew him as a charming companion from whose lips I never heard fall anything but the most delightful sentiments and the finest thoughts. So I prefer to remember him as I knew him, the gayest of the gay of companions;

and to those who never enjoyed the privilege of being in his company, and knew of him only when he had ceased to be the real Wilde we all admired, I would venture to recall a speech in "The Merchant of Venice" which I believe begins with a line to the effect that "The quality of mercy is not strained."

Innumerable are the witticisms laid at his door. What could be more delightful than his remark to the gushing female admirer who, shaking him warmly by the hand, said: "Oh, but Mr. Wilde, you don't remember me. My name is Smith." "Oh yes," said Wilde, "I remember your name perfectly—but I can't think of your face." It was Wilde who, on being asked on returning from a fashionable *première* how he liked the piece, replied: "My dear friend, it is the best play I ever slept through." And again, nothing could be neater than his remark to a well-known London manager who had bought a comedy in Paris called "His Wife." "I've got it, and I'm glad I have it," said the manager. "Do you know, Wilde, I've kept 'His Wife' for three years." "Really?" replied the poet. "Isn't it about time you married her?"

I sat with him once at a music-hall, the entertainment of which he looked upon with good-humoured tolerance. During the evening a man came on the stage whose speciality was mimicry. "Perfectly splendid!" said Wilde, putting his bent forefinger over his mouth, which was a great trick of his. "And I do think it so kind of him to tell us who he is imitating. It avoids all discussion, doesn't it?"

It is a remarkable thing how an imitation seldom fails to please, however poor. Simply announce a well-known

name, and doing anything will generally get a good round of applause, I suppose this being from the fact that the audience, if they are doubtful, feel they must be wrong. I proved this once myself, for after giving a lot of imitations, I announced: "I will now, ladies and gentlemen, give you an imitation of Richard Burbage." I recited a few lines of a poem, the house applauded as loudly as they had my impersonation of Irving, Barrett, and many well-known people of the day. When the appreciation had subsided, I said: "He has been dead 300 years." But I believe they thought that was a joke, though Burbage doesn't.

Sitting in a box opposite us that evening was a dealer in 60 per cent. young men, curios and precious stones, accompanied by a very beautiful lady whose hair matched her dress. I drew Wilde's attention to the couple, and looking up leisurely he said: "Yes, a charming woman, no doubt, and really Hogheimer never looks so well as he does among his '*objèt Tarts*'"!

Wilde's was a wonderful personality, and the sad ending of his career just as he had turned his mind seriously to the stage was a calamity to my profession, with the like of which is extremely difficult to find a comparison. It would have taken an extraordinarily brave man to have crossed swords with Wilde at any time. The only one we hear of who did so successfully was his sometime friend and other-time enemy—Whistler, whose tongue was as cutting as a tailor's scissors on a piece of Donegal tweed. I suppose the neatest thing Whistler ever said to Wilde was when Whistler having made a particularly brilliant *mot*, Wilde remarked: "Oh, Jimmy, I wish I had said that."

Whistler replied "You will"! The story is well known to many, I know, but it is so fine that I am hoping it may be new to some who are running their eyes over these brilliant recollections ; hence its appearance.

What a lot of famous people seemed to be alive in 1890! I suppose there are just as many to-day, and it is only that men loom larger on our mental horizon when the small hand on life's dial points to twenty, and the long hand is only just starting off for another of its circular jaunts.

CHAPTER X

HEARD FROM MY CORNER

THE number of stories with which Mr. Toole used to amuse his companions was legion. He seldom repeated himself, and I regret continually I did not keep a note-book when I was about with him, as many of his tales were of famous people of a bygone day whom he had known intimately, and gave interesting domestic sidelights on their lives which have not appeared in their biographies. It was he who told me many a story of H. J. Byron, the author of "Our Boys" and all the inimitable burlesques that delighted London in the seventies. From what one can gather of Byron, his dull sallies must have been as few as most men's witty ones. Nearly all his most famous sayings I have seen in print, but one or two things Mr. Toole told me I have not to my knowledge seen set down. For instance, his remark to William Duck, a well-known theatrical manager who only flirted with his h's and was never really on intimate terms with this important letter of the alphabet, was as quick as it was amusing. Duck was staying at Plymouth with Byron, and one morning having gone out earlier than usual Byron went in search of him. He ran him to earth near the Hoe, and asked him where he had been all the morning. "Oh," said Duck, "I've been taking a turn round the 'oe." "Have you?" said Byron; "well,

don't you think it's time you had a walk round the h ?" He joked almost up till the hour of his death.

Mr. Toole had in his possession probably the last letter Byron ever wrote. It was one of farewell, and even in this sad moment he could not refrain from letting his humour have its fling. It happened to be a little good-humoured chaff at the expense of Charles Collette. He will, I am sure, forgive my telling the story. It is in reality a tribute to his bright, cheery disposition; for Collette was in those days—as indeed he is to-day, as mercurial and as "Here-we-are-again—slap-you-on-the-back" a light comedian as ever stepped. The letter ran much in this way—I quote it from memory:—

"My Dear Johnny,—This is the last letter I shall ever write you. I am lying dying here, and to-day I have a great desire to see you all, dear old friend, once again, but it is not to be. I shall never get back to my beloved London unless someone suggests that I should be given a silent train journey, one on which for the first time no collector will bother me for my ticket. It is very peaceful and quiet down here. That's really why I left the metropolis—it is hard for dying men to stand the healthy handshakes of exuberant friends. Yes, it is very peaceful and still here, and the rest has helped me considerably. I—Good Heavens! what's that? Excuse me, dear Johnny; there is a frightful din going on in the street. I must get up and see what it is. I've seen—it's all right, Johnny—I thought it was Charles Collette, but it's only the Punch and Judy man."

The letter continued with a smile through its tears,

and ended briefly—the jokes making it sadder still. I suppose it is because laughter and Death are so far removed from one another that the coming of the long thin white-bearded man to the household of a comedian, with his invitation that there is no refusing, seems doubly unnecessary.

It was during the time of Byron's lesseeship of the Theatre Royal, Liverpool, that he made his famous *mot* to his box-office keeper. Barry Sullivan, who was the greatest provincial star at this time, was due to open at Byron's house in his famous impersonation of Richard III. Business had not been too good during the season, so Byron put on an extra fee for reserving seats, feeling sure the attraction was big enough to take a liberty with. It was with delight, therefore, that Byron saw a lengthy queue waiting at the box office to take seats for Sullivan's engagement. As he stood happily watching the number of people who wanted stalls increase every moment he heard an altercation begin which soon developed from a wrangle into a row. Becoming anxious to know what was the matter, he elbowed his way up to the box-office and inquired of the clerk what all the trouble was about. "It's no good, Mr. Byron," the man said—"they won't stand for it." "Stand for what?" said Byron. "Why," shouted an infuriated playgoer, "stand paying an extra shilling for booking seats for 'Richard III.'" "Oh well," said Byron, "if that's all it is it shall be remedied"; and wearily turning to his office keeper, he said: "Charles, off with his '*bob*': so much for 'booking 'em!'" These are the real circumstances of his story. Toole was with him at the time, and I have often heard

him tell it. It was a wonderful quip, and I doubt if he ever said anything better.

Once at a dinner party a fine roasted hare was served. "What a wonderful large hare!" said someone at the table. "Yes," said Byron, "it is a large hair—it's so large I thought it was a wig."

That night on taking leave of his hostess she observed he only had a hat and umbrella with him. "Surely, Mr. Byron," she exclaimed, "you wear a coat." "No, madam," said Byron, "I never was."

The next night he went to the theatre and saw an audience which was very thin and unappreciative. "They are a nice lot!" said one of the actors. "They are a nice few!" replied Byron.

Toole's Theatre was extremely old-fashioned, and, the stage being very far below the level of the street, air was at a premium, and dust reigned king of all. I mention this because in the room where I used to dress, we were continually having little surprises. One night we walked about in quite half a foot of water, and during the times we were not making up we were chasing cruising tennis-shoes and sailing-collars. The water had a faint, very clean smell about it reminiscent of chemists' shops and other pleasant places, which was accounted for when the stage-carpenter, to our horror, came in and said: "I'm sorry, gentlemen, it's the hospital next door; the mortuary tanks have overflowed; that's what all this 'ere wet is." These were in the days before the County Council wasted its time seeing that articles which couldn't possibly burn are made non-inflammable.

In casting my mind back at random, as I am doing,

I am conscious that nearly all the best stories I have heard were told me by Mr. Toole himself, or by the people I met in his company. Some of the anecdotes of Macready, the famous tragedian, who invented what is known to actors as the "Macready pause," because of the length of time that fine actor frequently took to get on with the next sentence, while he made effects with looks and noddings of the head, assisted with exclamations such as "Ah!" "Oh!" and "Humph!" are amusing. He had a trick of talking under his breath during the progress of a scene, and often at the end of his lines.

In a costume play, the name of which I have forgotten, he had to point to a young man who was playing the part of a beau of the period. The youth, who had been cast for the part, was untidy and somewhat slovenly in appearance, and by no means pleased Macready when he made his entrance. The tragedian looked hard at him before eulogising him as he should have done, and, when he did speak, added one of his own habitual asides so loudly that the house roared with laughter. "See where the young prince comes," said Macready, "a very noble youth, of handsome face and gallant bearing. God forgive me, look at his dirty neck."

He was a fine, but, I have often been told, a somewhat stilted, actor of the old school; that is to say, he got his effects by theatrical rather than by natural methods, though he seemingly was not conscious of his peculiarity in this respect, for, losing his temper at rehearsal with a small part actor whom he was trying to teach, he shouted out in laborious tones: "Why, sir—why, sir—er

—can't you—er—sir, be natural—nat—ur—al—sir, as I am?" The wretched actor, who must have had more aptitude for repartee than stage playing, replied in front of the whole company: "Because if I could, Mr. Macready, I should be getting your salary, and you'd be paid my thirty shillings a week," which seems unanswerable on the face of it.

Macready was, I gather from his own admissions, a man of ungovernable temper at times Indeed, some of the extracts from his diary are most amusing. One comes across such entries as these:

"May—the first of May—the month dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. May I live this month in humility and at peace with all men."

"May 2nd. Got up. Breakfasted. Went to rehearsal at 10.30; lost my temper and struck the prompter. *Dominus vobiscum.* This must never occur again."

"May 3rd. Went to rehearsal full of good resolutions. Hit the prompter twice in the face. Alas! my temper is a great affliction. Gave the prompter five shillings. Hit him again before leaving. How can I curb this? *Mea maxima culpa,*" and so on.

When playing Macbeth one night at Manchester his servant, who should have been in the wings with a bowl of cochineal which Macready used to smear on his hands to represent blood, failed to put in an appearance. Macready's exit was only a very momentary and rapid one, and finding that the blood he relied on for the next scene was not at hand, he rushed up to an inoffensive commercial traveller, who had been allowed as a great treat by his friend, the local stage-manager, to come and watch the mighty star from the side, and without

any warning struck him a violent blow on the nose, smothered his hands in the blood that flowed freely, and ran on to the stage again to finish the performance. When the curtain fell he apologised to the commercial for his apparent rudeness, as he put it, in the most courtly and chivalrous manner, presenting the object of his attentions with a five-pound note.

Like most tragedians of every school, Macready grew his hair long. The story is told of him that once at the dress rehearsal of a new Byzantine tragedy at Drury Lane he was displeased with the make-up of one of the actors, and, having verbally pulled him to pieces, finished up by saying, "Ah, sir, your hair, sir—your hair is long; it was only fools who wore their hair long in this age, sir." "Really, Mr. Macready," said the actor, "I can assure you that there have been fools in every age who have worn long hair." History does not repeat what happened, but, if the great actor's diary is any guide, it is more than probable the temerity of the actor was rewarded much as was the stupidity of the prompter.

Towards the end of the run of "Walker, London," I wrote a one-act military play called "The New Sub," which was a great success, and ran about four hundred nights in the famous "Pantomime Rehearsal" triple bill at the Court Theatre. There was little credit due to me for the pleasure it gave the public. The praise was due to Leo Trevor, from whose charming story I adapted it. I make mention of it merely because its success started me on a career of dramatic carpentry which I have unblushingly pursued ever since.

About this time I had the good fortune to be elected

a member of the Beefsteak Club. How I got in in those days I don't know; I fancy it must have been that I was mistaken for someone else. It takes about seven years to become a member to-day, that is if you are lucky enough to get through its exclusive portals at all. In 1893 it was the rendezvous of men who were all famous in their own particular worlds; everyone was someone. It was never full till eleven, and seldom empty till the street lamps were being put out and the birds were heralding another day. Corney Grain, Arthur Cecil, Charles Brookfield, German Reed, Henry Irving, Toole, Archie Wortley, Sir George Chetwynd, the Earl of Cork, and scores of all the best-known men in literature and art foregathered there every evening. The Club in those days was one great room situated over Toole's Theatre, in King William Street, and the witty things said there were brighter than the burnished silver with which its sideboards and supper-tables were laden. If the pictures could only speak, and a few newspaper editors were allowed in to talk to them, the comic papers would no longer be the dull things they are at present, and would easily remain merry for a century.

Charles Brookfield said most of the witty things that are coupled with his name in the old Beefsteak Club. I remember one evening sitting at the end of the long table talking with several other actors, or rather listening to them, while at the other end was a group of well-known painters. The Royal Academy had opened its doors that day, and Archie Wortley, who was the centre of the group, was discussing the hanging committee of that classic institution and criticising

them somewhat severely. Wortley's two pictures had been refused, he being unrepresented for the first and only time on the Academy walls. He was irritable and out of temper, and I suppose our laughter at one of Brookfield's stories jarred on his nerves that night, for, angrily looking up, he said: "Brookfield, I wish you actors could contrive to make less noise! We can see you in the theatre any night we like for ten-and-six-pence." "I know," said Brookfield; "I thought I could see you to-day at the Academy for a shilling, but I didn't." Brookfield's replies were nothing if not pointed, and their points were generally dipped in acid of varying strength. It was he who successfully stopped with a laugh the aggravating habit that a gallant volunteer colonel had of continually coming to the Club dressed in full uniform. This gentleman had never seen any service at all, and, with the exception of the battle of Euston Station or a heavy engagement in Piccadilly on the occasion of a foreign potentate's visit to London, had never been really under fire. Why he dressed in uniform no one ever knew. I believe he used to get up from his own dinner-table and say to his wife: "I must dress for the Club." She, no doubt, had an idea that because so many members were actors we were all officers in "The Tower Hamlets."

One night, as he sat at supper, his manly chest covered with orders (they may have been free passes to some of the theatres for all we knew), or what is a very common decoration nowadays, the B.I.H.D.A.'s ("Because I haven't done anything"), Brookfield on entering, much to everyone's amusement and the gallant soldier's discomfiture, said, as he appeared in

the doorway: "Waiter, could you tell me whose charger that is that's tied up in the lavatory?" We never saw him in his uniform again.

It was Corney Grain, that prince of humorists at the piano, who, one night when being chaffed because business was not too good at his hall of entertainment, turned to his assailant and said, in front of his partner: "Dear fellow, what can I do? When the weather is stormy all I have to lean upon is a German Reed."

Grain, as everyone knows, was of colossal proportions, and Mr. and Mrs. German Reed's entertainment was the stand-by of the mothers with that appalling nuisance, the miss of fifteen, who is not supposed to see anything in the shape of art unless it has been filtered through the Sunday school or disinfected by Mrs. Grundy.

I had the honour of meeting W. S. Gilbert for the first time at the Beefsteak. I had been brought up to believe that he was a very terrible person, who snapped off your nose with an epigram if you ventured an opinion, and who wanted no better pretext for a quarrel than if you asked him to pass the salt politely. Greater nonsense as to the difficulty of getting on with Mr. Gilbert has never been thought of. I have had the great pleasure of knowing him for many years, and a kinder host or more helpful and encouraging gentleman never stepped in shoe leather.

It is quite easy to understand why a reputation for being quarrelsome is obtained by certain people if they have to depend for the marginal notes on their lives being made by a class of not too scrupulous gentlemen, who, I am sorry to say, are not altogether unknown

to those connected with the running of theatrical enterprises.

There is no nonsense from W. S. Gilbert with these folks, and there is no picking of words. I heard him say once to a well-known ruffian who was lessee of several West End theatres, and in whose house a Gilbert opera was being rehearsed : " Your place, sir, is the dock of the Old Bailey, and for two pins I'd put you there. Get off your stage, and never dare to put your foot on it as long as I rehearse this company." The man got no less than he deserved, for he had acted dishonourably and told deliberate lies. He doubtless, however, is one of those who would not be one of the great humorist's most kindly biographers.

W. S. Gilbert as an audience is calculated to give the toughest veteran panic; he knows every turn and twist of the stage and more about its technique than 95 per cent. of all the actors alive to-day put together, and, while not an unkind critic, you are conscious that he could truthfully, if he chose, say so much more than he does in adverse criticism if he wanted to.

At rehearsal once the story is told of him that, having gone back and back in a part with a well-known actor until he was tired, he left the stage for the stalls and said: " Now we'll begin all over again." The actor, who no doubt was angry at being sent over the words so often and shown up before a large company, thought he would cross swords with Mr. Gilbert and save his face by picking a quarrel. He waited till he was told again it was all wrong for about the hundredth time, and then, stepping down to the footlights, he shouted to the man of a thousand Savoy delights : " Mr. Gilbert, I

am not a very good-tempered man." "No," said Gilbert, "I'm not considered to have the temper of a saint either." "But I'd like you to understand, Mr. Gilbert, that I am a very strong man." "Really?" said Gilbert. "Well, I stand six feet four in my stockinged feet, but if you *want* to know the difference between us I am an extremely clever man." The rehearsal went on, and the actor went back many a time and oft, but there were no more comic interludes of this kind recorded. It was to a singularly imperfect actor at rehearsal, who was being pulled up for continual collaboration with the author, that Gilbert made a remark which has become a stock phrase in the theatre. The artist said: "Look here, Mr. Gilbert, *I know my lines.*" "I know you do," rapped out Gilbert, "but you don't *know mine.*"

I remember saying to him once what a contempt I had for a jackal of one of our musical comedy managers, and thinking what a large salary he must receive to be able to buy enough soap to wash his hands with after all the dirty work he was set to do. "Yes," said Gilbert, "no one likes him better than I do, and I can't stand him at any price." Which was a nice way of setting the seal on the popularity of any man.

Once when he was producing one of his plays for a celebrated manager he was continually having trouble with him owing to the manager's closeness and propensity for skimping things. At the dress rehearsal Gilbert called out to a girl who was standing still when she ought to have been waving her hands: "Why aren't you doing your business?" "Please, sir," said the lady, "I haven't got my tambourine." "Oh, that

will be all right, my dear," said the author. "Mr. Dash will *hire* that."

It was at the production of this, too, that he got a lasting laugh at the expense of that most popular of comedians, Rutland Barrington. One of Barrington's peculiarities—the exercise of which the public love, and have grown to expect from him—is that he sometimes sings out of tune. I do hope Barrington won't sue me for libel for saying this, as I am one of the staunchest admirers of his inimitable laugh-provoking qualities. On one of the Gilbert *premières* Mr. Gilbert was seated in a box watching his work when a young lady turned to him and said excitedly: "Oh, Mr. Gilbert, Rutland Barrington is singing in tune." "Oh, don't worry about that, my dear," said Gilbert; "it's only first night nervousness: he'll get over it."

In front of me as I write there is a photograph, and on it an inscription which reads: "To Seymour Hicks, from W. S. Gilbert, born 1836; died ——; *deeply regretted by all who didn't know him.*" The joke looks a grim one at first sight, but it isn't at all, for the whole world knows Gilbert.

I could go on telling stories by the hour of the various people I have met or heard interesting anecdotes of, but my fear is that things which appeal to me may not be so entertaining to those who have not met all the subjects of these little tales in the flesh.

It is very difficult to know in a volume of this kind what to pick out from a time of one's life when one was a listener only and did not join in the conversational fray as one does to-day, armed with oratorical shafts plucked from other men's quivers.

Later, in dealing with facts that actually happened to myself, I hope that I shall rattle along on current topics and be able to keep the reader awake between London and Grantham, or whatever railway stations he has a particular *penchant* for. If I leave my listening period and proceed too rapidly to my jackdaw days it will be difficult to return to the old actors or to episodes of 1890 without making things seem constructively wrong.

Some wag said that no better biography had been written than Henry Irving's Life of Bram Stoker, and I must confess in writing these reminiscences of myself I find the greatest difficulty in not speaking a good deal too much about Hicks—but I beg to be forgiven and will only do so when it is very necessary.

CHAPTER XI

FROM A SCOTTISH WINDOW

I AM writing while on a six months' holiday in Scotland, having to trust absolutely to my memory and allowing one thing to bring back to my mind another, as best it may, hoping that this incident will father that one, and the last become sponsor to another.

The absence of notes and data makes one's work difficult and peculiarly dependent on moods. On a Tuesday, off one canters, one's brain riding the good mare "Fiction" at a hand-gallop of 1,000 words an hour. Wednesday comes, and that old-fashioned hack—"Fact"—by "Humdrum" out of "Circumstance" is brought out of the stable of thought; and pens stick, and blot, and ink-pots must be tilted to-day, and the paper seems rough; and somehow one begins to woolgather and develop an undue admiration for a pair of field glasses which seem to whisper, "I want to pick up that stag on the sky line there"—so that when a gong goes later on one finds oneself with only some 500 words to one's credit at the publisher's bank, most of which will be torn up on Thursday.

New and beautiful surroundings make work extremely difficult. To me it is much easier to imagine and write of the pearl divers of an inland sea in a back room looking on Great Portland Street than it is to try and wonder what they do as I lie gazing on a burning summer's day into the depths of blue Scotch waters.

The London life of a hard-worked man is the continual spinning of a roulette wheel. It may be red—it may turn up black—but the labour and the method of the spinning is always the same, day in and day out. In the town distractions as a rule are only new worries that look in at the office door and ask to be taken out to lunch and, like all worries should be and are, forgotten with the paying of the bill. But, in the country, odd happenings are nearly always new beauties, and to the collector of the King's portrait on various kinds of precious metals, these charms are as unsettling as were the gorgeous women Mephistopheles conjured up in the imagination of the sapless Faust.

A townsman's library is so different from his brother's of the plough—The Book of Nature isn't catalogued in Bond Street. Ferrets somehow do not get hung up in Piccadilly. There is no wondering in Hyde Park if eighteen eggs will hatch out of the made-up nest of twenty that old mother Partridge is guarding so carefully, and there is no bracken in Gower Street from which the wily curlew entices the intruder away and away into the distance with shrill whistling calls so that her young may be left undisturbed. All my thoughts *in* the country become *of* it. If I look long enough at my purple blotting-pad I see on it in my mind's eye heather with dogs ranging out and, that tiger of the air, the gallant grouse whirring away like a huge bee to the farthest line of sweeping moorland.

If I gaze at the dripping syphon not too far from hand I see a spate rising, and the pool on the leather table becomes a tidal one full of lice-covered streaks of silver who jump greedily at the claret

body and woodcock's wing that is fished crosswise to them.

Habit is a capital jockey, but he rides best for me where I first engaged him, in the fog, and the damp, and the noise, and the smell, and to the music of the humble sparrow.

The thoughts of the country make me think of that mightiest of actors, Samuel Phelps. He was an ardent disciple of the piscatorial Izaak, and spent all the leisure he could command on his favourite water at Farningham. His were the days when flies were tied on the bankside and the black gnat—or the olive dun (a fly I always call the *West End tradesman*)—floated perkily downstream on a length of horsehair; drawn gut and Farlow's elaborate *ménu* then being scarcely known.

Of Phelps the story is told that, having cast every conceivable pattern over trout basking in a gin-clear stream under a cloudless sky without even rising a fish, he took a bulky fly book from his pocket and flung it in the water, gravely saying to the fish, "Oh! go on, gentlemen, take your choice."

Many a time have I leaned against the silver birches which border Phelps' river and wondered, as I creeled a handsome two-pounder, whether I was having the honour of laying between my cool rushes—a descendant of one of the great actor's "kills."

Many of his most tender and beautiful creations have no doubt had their birth in his mind watching the swirling waters rushing to the dam here at my feet—or standing farther upstream near the still pool there, where the heavy plob of a good fish may be heard

making the bass accompaniment in Nature's orchestra of drone and insect, who play in summer time for the fisherman under the *bâton* of the gaily clad kingfisher.

In Phelps' days Farningham was a journey from London, and few who saw a quiet old gentleman casting his dry fly from the meadows near the gabled inn realised that they were watching one of the four greatest figures in stage history dating from the days of Garrick. Indeed, so little was he recognised in his seclusion that, one night when he made his entrance as Macbeth at Drury Lane, an old farmer jumped up excitedly in the pit and shouted to his wife: "Blow me, Mary Ellen, if that bean't the old codger who has been fishing trout from our fields all these years!"

David Garrick, Edmund Kean, Samuel Phelps, and Henry Irving—they are the four beacon lights that all we small craft see as we sail down our coast of art.

The Kembles there were, and I mean no disrespect to them—the Macreadys and the Creswicks—giants all, no doubt; but whatever diversity of opinion may exist as to whether Kean was greater than Garrick or Phelps, and Irving as great as either of them, there surely are few who will dispute the superlative excellence of these four tragedians, who stood head and shoulders above their fellows in a class entirely of their own.

Sport and the country make me think, too, of F. R. Benson. I suppose no actor who ever lived has been such an all-round enthusiast on games as this old 'Varsity blue, whether it be cricket, running, hockey, or football. It is said of him that if he is debating which of two actors to engage for a certain part,

the slightly inferior artist, if he be a fine athlete, will most certainly obtain the coveted honour of employment under the Bensonian banner.

I have heard it said, though I cannot vouch for the story, that Mr. Benson's contracts with his artists are always worded: "To play the Ghost in 'Hamlet' and keep wicket"—or "To play Laertes and field cover-point"; and it is said that no Polonius need apply unless he is a first-class googly bowler.

I think it was at the Beefsteak Club I first met Harry Kemble—his performances and his lamented death are too recent for me to have to remind playgoers of his sterling qualities as an actor. But good as he was on the stage, he was, if possible, better off it. He knew everybody that was worth knowing, but hated cant and humbug of any kind or a snob beyond power of expression. Once, when some youth, with a head not overstocked with grey matter, talked of nothing but titled nonentities for about an hour by the clock, and at the end of his discourse turned to Kemble for corroboration as to the characteristics of some noble duke, the dear old Beetle, as Kemble was known to those he was fond of, turned a cold eye on him and squashed him by saying: "I really can't say anything about the gentleman. The only member of the British aristocracy I know is Lord George Sanger." The young man, who was a smart lad of the village, saw what was meant, and thought he would begin to chaff the Kemble, whom he hardly knew and whom he considered no doubt as nothing but a pocket Falstaff. This was a very dangerous move on his part, and Kemble did not allow him to proceed far. He simply

looked at him vacantly, and said: "Sir, I don't remember ever having met you before"; and then, as if recollecting suddenly, he said profoundly: "Oh! ah! yes, of course, once in a public-house at Oldham!!!!" Why a public-house, and why Oldham, no one has ever been able to make out to this day; but it seemed to be good enough to stop the young man, and with stately mien our Kemble rose, saying as he moved towards the door: "Yes, at Oldham, it *was* at Oldham, I remember; and if you, sir, care to renew that acquaintance, please meet me to-morrow at 12 o'clock at the Marble Arch; I shall *not be there*."

It was with Harry Kemble that I met Arditi, the celebrated conductor. He was as bald as a coot, and often told an amusing story of how he convinced a bank clerk in Liverpool of his identity by his baldness and so got a draft honoured, which was at first refused. Arditi went into the bank and presented a cheque across the counter made payable to himself. The cashier, who was a great lover of music and who knew all the celebrated people in the concert and operatic world, looked at Arditi and handed the cheque back to him, saying: "This won't do, it is made payable to Arditi." "But I am Arditi," said the musician. "Oh, no, you're not—oh, dear no! You can't take me in. I know Arditi. I have seen him conduct dozens of times," said the bank clerk. "Oh!" said the old man. "You have seen him conduct?" "Yes, often," replied the careful business man. "Good! then you shall recognise his face," said Arditi. With this, he removed his hat and turning his back on the cashier, began to beat four in a bar with his umbrella.

The effect was magical. "Oh!" said the bank man. "Yes, yes, I recognise you. I know your bald face now"; and he gave him the money instantly. "So, you see," Arditi would always finish his story, "the back of my old head was good for something once, wasn't it?"

Musical people are supposed of all types in theatrical business to be the most difficult to persuade and conciliate; those I have met have been more like spoiled children than anything else. The late Sir Augustus Harris, known generally as Gusarris, told me once that, when he travelled the whole Italian Opera Company from Covent Garden through England on their first big tour, the only way he could get the male singers to go to bed in the sleeping compartments with a rival artist sleeping in the berth above them was to put a placard with the word "and" in large letters between the bunks, so that the underneath tenor felt he was being starred as was customary in the newspapers. By this means Gusarris travelled them round without hurting their artistic sense. The word "if" may have much virtue in it, but the despised "and" helped the impressario to travel his entire company without bickering or petty jealousies.

The starring system is carried with these people to a ridiculous extent, and, in a discussion regarding the insertion of the word "and" before certain performers' names, Comyns Carr once wittily remarked, "Why put the 'and where the 'art can never be?" I think most of the stars I see would be much better advertised if they had the word "but" put before their names in the newspapers.

Augustus Harris always used to say that one of the funniest replies ever made him during production time was said unconsciously by a little boy dressed as a pear in one of the Christmas pantomime ballets. The different sets of children dressed as various fruits were coming down the stage in the palace scene at the end of the performance, when Sir Augustus noticed that while there were ten pears there were only nine apples. "Hi!" said Druriolanus, "stop! hi! where is the other apple?" A boy who was dressed as a pear stepped forward and said, "Beg pardon, Sir 'Arris, but the other apple is being sick in the dressing-room." This explained the scarcity of fruit, and the pantomime rehearsal continued peacefully once more.

I well remember the day the bust of Sir Augustus Harris was unveiled in Drury Lane itself. I was standing near my old friend Arthur Collins, who has so splendidly and successfully carried on the traditions of the National Theatre, and meaning to pay him a compliment, he having just taken over the entire management of the house, I said, "Well, my dear Arthur, I hope it won't be long before we see a bust of you there too!" He stared for a moment, and then was as much amused as I was. It had not struck me that they only put up effigies as a rule to the departed. It was coming out of a theatre not a hundred miles from Drury Lane, on a first night, that I met that charming lady and witty writer, "Frank Danby." Not having been present at the play I enquired of her what she thought of it. "Oh!" she said, smilingly, "there were two good lines in it, but I don't think they were good enough to run an engine on."

Henry Hamilton, the well-known dramatist so long connected with Sir Augustus, christened him "The Literary Jack the Ripper," for whenever the manager of the National Theatre thought a play was too long his custom was to ask for a pin, and taking a dozen pages at random, stick them together and say, "They're out, now go on." Of course this isn't literally true, but I believe from all accounts Gusarris was ruthless with his blue pencil.

Henry Hamilton has a sharp tongue, as becomes a brilliant writer. It was he who christened a critic he disliked "the puff-adder," and, when I was introduced to him by Yorke Stephens at the Old Green Room Club in my very earliest days of acting, as "This is young Hicks, Hamilton; I have put him on the stage," he looked at me and said, "My dear Stephens, what harm has the poor lad ever done you?"

In the Green Room Club there is a chair that was the property of David Garrick. Hamilton, entering the reading-room one day, saw Charles Wyndham, who was at that time delighting London by his beautiful performance of Garrick at the Criterion Theatre. "Ah!" said Hamilton, to our greatest light comedian as he lolled back in Davy's chair, "More like Garrick every day and less like him every night." He of course did not mean it, but it was one of the typical things Henry Hamilton does say if he is so minded.

A story of another kind which illustrates the sly, delicious and gentle humour of J. M. Barrie, my theatrical fairy godfather, in whose play I was still appearing at this period of these reminiscences, was one told of him not so very long ago, as he sat watching

a rehearsal being carried on under the able direction of Mr. Granville Barker. No one does his work more artistically than Mr. Barker or with greater effect, but he is at times inclined, I believe, to try and get the ordinary actor to convey, by a look or a movement, possibilities in a part that the dialogue has not suggested to the average intelligence, and on this occasion he called out to one of the characters, "Thank you! Now I want you to go up the stage, and, opening a book, lean over the back of that chair and convey by your expression that you have a brother who is a large shipowner in Sunderland." This, no doubt, would have been quite possible for Mr. Barker, but it is a large order to expect of a salaried artist, and this thought must certainly have entered Mr. Barrie's head as he sat smoking his inevitable briarwood pipe in the stalls.

No remark was passed by him at the time, and nearly half an hour went by without a word, when J. M. B. softly called out to one of the actors in the next scene, "Mr. Smith, would you mind coming slowly down the stage, and when you have said your lines I want you to turn your back to the audience and convey to them that you have a brother who drinks port in Shropshire." No one but a Barrie could have thrown so delicate and good-humoured a shaft, for his is a wit that offends no living creature, and it is well known that Peter Pan's father has never made an enemy in his life.

The summer of 1893 had come and the days of the play at Toole's were numbered. "Walker" had walked for just 600 performances, and when the termination of this splendid success was at hand I was surprised to receive a letter from Mr. Pinero asking me to come and

see him on business if I was free to do so. I was free, and I immediately went to Mr. Pinero's house, full of hope and anxious beyond measure, for to obtain a part in one of his plays is an end for which actors often wait weeks and weeks out of engagement.

He looked me up and down, told me he was pleased with the way I had done my work at Toole's Theatre, and that he thought he had a part for me in a new piece of his called "The Amazons," the only thing that made him in doubt of me at all being my somewhat slight physique. I only weighed nine stone at that time. He explained that I was supposed to have carried the heroine up two flights of stairs, and he wasn't sure that I could convey the impression of having done so. But he said, "You could play the part well enough, so go to your tailor's, get measured for a shooting suit, and build yourself up to look as powerful as you can." Accordingly off I went, and had a light tweed Norfolk suit made which I was measured for over a complete suit of padding-tights, shoulders, chest, and stomach. The suit was finished, and it was arranged I should drive in a hansom to our premier dramatist's house for inspection. I surveyed myself in the glass before starting, and I looked a veritable Hercules, capable of not only carrying any number of heroines on my shoulders, but even a play, no matter how heavy its dialogue weighed. I felt certain that all would be well, and sang blithely to myself as I dashed along to St. John's Wood.

On arrival the door was opened by Mr. Pinero himself who, to my surprise, instead of saying "magnificent," burst out laughing and said, "My dear fellow, you look

like a pantomime giant"—and I believe I must have done so. It had quite escaped the tailor and myself that in building me up everywhere my head would naturally appear half the size and out of all proportion to my Herculean frame. I had not then made success enough to suffer from beriberi—a disease very common among worshippers at the Shrine of Thespis—and so pimple-like my head appeared from out of the mass of padding, that it was the means of my losing this great chance. It was a bitter blow, but through my life I have always believed that everything turns out for the best, and I drove home a better developed, though a sadder, man. Indeed, a long experience in the theatrical profession has taught me to wonder what on earth has happened if anything in it turns out a real success, and it is my custom now not to say: "Such and such a thing went *wrong* to-day," but each night to ask myself if any *one* thing has gone *right*, and if I can say: "*Yes, one thing did go right*," then I lay my head thankfully on my pillow and sleep contentedly.

Mr. Toole prolonged his season, and I had one or two little plays produced of my own, which, however, only met with moderate success. I obtained parts at *matinée* performances for which I received fair notices and small money; and very often I went out at night after the play to private houses to appear in duologues or give supposedly humorous recitations, all which brought grist to a needing mill.

CHAPTER XII

THE BLIND BOW-BOY

About now I had a message from my old friend Arthur Chudleigh saying that a new play he was producing at the Court, called "The Other Fellow," had a light comedy part in it, not a very good one, but if I was doing nothing and cared to play it I could have my salary. The piece then being performed at his theatre was "The Guardsman," a very successful farce by Sims and Raleigh.

Finishing my part early at Toole's, I went down to see Chudleigh the evening I received his note. As I stood waiting for him in a corner of the dress circle near the stage I watched the end of the last act of the farce, and was laughing at the dilemma Arthur Cecil was trying to get himself out of, owing, I gathered, to peccadilloes he had committed in the preceding portions of the play, when through a door there ran a vision in an evening gown over which was a green velvet cloak, trimmed with Irish lace. I can see it now. The vision implored Arthur Cecil to hide her somewhere, and as she turned to make her exit through one of those doors so necessary to the last act of all good farces she seemed to look straight at me. In a moment I recognised the lovely face of the girl I had met five years before in the manager's office at the Princess's Theatre. I knew I was not mistaken; there could not

be two women so dainty, so beautiful, and so fairy-like in the world. It must be Ellaline Terriss. I asked an attendant, and I found it was. I begged Chudleigh to take me round at once and introduce me to her, but he only laughed and told me that I should have her father, William Terriss, after me if he did, as he fetched her every evening and allowed no admirers of any kind. But I told Chudleigh I must know her even if I braved the Adelphi hero himself, and so, after long entreaty, he promised I should be introduced to her on the morrow at rehearsal, as she was to play the *ingénue* part in the new farce. This settled any doubts I had as to whether I would play a bad part or not; I made up my mind to "walk on" if necessary, so that I might be near the vision in the green cloak that I had fallen in love with at first sight.

The next morning I went to rehearsal half an hour before I need, and waited impatiently. She was the last to arrive. Chudleigh, laughing at my anxiety, took me up to what appeared to me to be a very dainty piece of Dresden china! I heard the words, "Ella, may I introduce a great friend of mine to you—young Hicks?" Three weeks afterwards young Hicks and the Dresden shepherdess were married at a registry office in the old parish of Brentford. How it all came about so suddenly we often laugh and wonder to this day. It had better be written down that I was impudent, bold, and became such a nuisance that in self-defence and perhaps out of pity Beauty held her hand out to the poor Beast. Three weeks of course is a remarkably short time to take such a step in, but several circumstances helped matters on, any one of which had it not

occurred might have delayed matters indefinitely. In the first place, two days after our meeting William Terriss sailed for America with Henry Irving. Had he remained in England, I doubt if he would ever have allowed the apple of his eye to marry an unknown and penniless young man, and he would have been quite right, of course. Then again, as I was the only young light comedian in the theatre, it fell to my lot to be cast for the lover in a little musical duologue called "His Last Chance," which was to be performed before the piece of the evening, and in which Miss Terriss was to play the leading *rôle*.

This, of course, threw us together all day long, as, the time being very short, we had to work on the first piece when the people in the farce were dismissed. Somehow the rehearsals for "His Last Chance" became longer and longer. I wonder why this was. Was it that from the outset I realised dimly not only that this was *My First Chance*, but in fact *My Great Chance?* Yes, it must have been that I realised I had fallen in love with a woman of no ordinary kind, and was conscious that "there is a tide in the affairs of love which if taken at the flood leads on to happiness," but if that tide be missed, Cupid more often than not welcomes a new passenger aboard his mistress's boat at sundown when the next ebb comes. I don't know or remember anything except that I loved her madly, and that she did me the great honour of returning my affection.

Is it lifting the veil too high to say I had the audacity to propose on the eighth day after our meeting in a carriage on the Underground Railway that was taking us to her home in Bedford Park, and that the woman

without whom I should never have been heard of said yes, she would marry me if her father would consent? But she was afraid he would be very difficult.

Without an instant's delay we broke the news to her mother, the gentlest and most affectionate of women, who, to my surprise, accepted the situation with delight, saying her daughter's happiness was all she cared for, and she knew her little girl was happy. She advised us to cable to Mr. Terriss without delay and tell him boldly. It took a long time to try and concoct a cable, and in the end all the drafts were torn up, and one was sent quite simply from the daughter to her father saying: "Dearest father, may I be engaged to Seymour Hicks? Love—Ella." Anxiously we waited the reply. It came: "Certainly not—wait till I return—writing—Father."

Return? This meant ten months before we could be engaged even. A council of war was held, and knowing that William Terriss was—very rightly—from all common-sense points of view certain to stop such a poor match as I would make for his only daughter, it became a question whether we should part for ever or get married at once. We put our two-and-twenty-year-old heads together, and, aided and abetted by a loving mother, went straight off and bought a special licence. The few days that intervened before I became the happiest man in the world dragged as only lovers know how time can drag. But the wonderful day arrived, and no king who ever entered a foreign capital at the head of a victorious army was ever prouder than we were —She, my wonderful She, and I—as we entered the High Street, Brentford, in the worst-looking hansom I have ever seen.

We discharged it some way from the parish offices, so as not to attract the attention of the folk who kept a tobacconist's shop hard by, and from whom we had a few days before obtained our licence; and with smiles on our faces which would have made us unrecognisable to our most intimate friends, we stole quietly down to a door on which we saw the magic word "Registrar." We were conscious we were doing a desperate thing, but somehow I think we felt we could work, and the pause on the threshold of the brown painted portico was one in which we renewed a silent pledge of trust rather than felt any misgiving as to the future.

Two urchins standing at the door said: "Oh my! Look at 'em going to be married," and we scuttled in as quickly as we could, and inquired for the man who was the most important person, as far as we were concerned, we had ever met in this delightful world.

Alone we stood in a tiny room in front of an automaton, who was not quite sure whether we were surrendering to our bail or had come to try and borrow money. And yet no Juliet's balcony or Phœbe's garden could have been more laden with romance than this stuffy office, which was the main artery, or nerve centre, of the gaswork-smelling Brentford, whose inhabitants had cast for the part of Hymen a little man with a ragged moustache and an eye glazed with indifference.

He looked up sleepily, and I believe had I said "I have murdered a woman in the next street," he would only have replied: "You're in the wrong office—second door to the left upstairs."

He took the licence and grunted: "Oh! marriage, is it?" And not being without a sense of humour, we began to laugh quietly at the ridiculously commonplace treatment our great event was being subjected to. "Got any witnesses?" said the registrar. "No," said we, "none." "Then you'll have to pay two. Hi, Bill!" he shouted, ringing a hand-bell; "look outside and see if there's any one who'll witness a marriage. It will cost you five bob," said the Government official—"two-and-six a nob. I daresay that won't hurt you." We assured him with the air of millionaires that of course it wouldn't, and I am certain my manner would never have conveyed that £20 was all we had in the wide, wide world. Two rather shabby-looking men entered. The door was closed, and the three inhuman beings opposite us made a very poor production for my pretty shepherdess, I'm afraid; but she stood in a little blue serge dress, with a blue straw hat trimmed with a pair of white wings, looking as happy and contented as any bride whose marriage was the occasion for the countryside to take a holiday and to practise throwing old boots and rice at the lord of the manor's only child.

We signed the certificate. There was a momentary look and a laugh from us both when the registrar asked Mary Ellaline Lewin, "Is your father alive?" "Yes," she replied, "very much alive"; and we thought at that moment of how much we owed to America and the Atlantic Ocean for our happiness.

The two half-crown witnesses who had been found were both slightly intoxicated, we discovered, when told to stand up; and they did so with the conscious dignity

that comes to men in that happy condition, and who are proud that their heads have conquered their knees. "Edward Seymour George Harris, will you take this woman to be your wedded wife?" rang out dull and huskily from the limb of the law. I explained that, were my name Harris, I should only be too honoured to do so, but as it was Hicks, just for the look of the thing, I had better be called Hicks. It was a name I had had for twenty-two years, I had grown accustomed to it, and I did not want to have it altered on this October morning at such short notice. "If it's Hicks, why don't you speak more distinctly?" came the retort courteous. I didn't think it worth while to argue, and when the last "I will" had been said, the ring put on, and the five shillings paid to the brothers Bacchus, we stepped out into the sunlight *Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Hicks.* I remember I walked along ahead of my darling, turning back all the way to admire her as she shyly followed.

We decided that we had better make straight for Piccadilly Circus, and this we did by tram and 'bus. Arrived there, the boy with the bow and arrows whispered in our ears: "Well, I've done my work well, haven't I? Don't I get anything to eat?" We both felt this would be a very sound move, and entering the Café Monico, we sat at a little table on the right-hand side of the door and ordered our wedding breakfast — Irish stew and a bottle of Burgundy! What a meal it was! Had there ever been such another? In black and white the *ménu* may not seem romantic, but embroidered as it was with looks, and whisperings, and silences, air and butterflies' wings would have been heavy fare compared to it.

The first person we broke our secret to was Mr. Terriss's brother, Dr. Lewin. I expected to be seriously jumped on by so near a relative, but he proved to be a genial, kindly philosopher, who wished us all happiness, and said, although his brother would be upset, it would be all right, he supposed, and went upon his even, happy way. We were very grateful to him, I remember, for his kindness. The next friend we took into our confidence was Arthur Chudleigh. His face was a study. All he could say was, "What? Why, hang it! I wanted to marry the girl myself." We played our parts that evening as usual, and told no one.

The following night, during the performance, an actor in the company proposed marriage to Miss Ellaline Terriss. Circumstances, of course, did not permit of her entertaining this flattering offer, and her polite refusal provoked my twenty-four-hour late rival to say: "What you can see in that fellow Hicks I don't know. Why do you go about with him?" "Because he is my husband," said Miss Terriss, with, I gathered, no small amount of pride. And from that moment our secret was everybody's. I was cordially congratulated by all the women and scowled at by all the men. Poor girl, she was supposed to have thrown herself away, ruined her career, and I was the villain of the play. The first year or two for the man who marries a popular beauty isn't all port wine and bowls. But we didn't mind; we were young enough to laugh at the world, and as no one is a cynic after the age of twenty, we took a house in Sloane Street, and let our friends say what they liked. I need hardly say that it did not take them very long to discover that we were frightfully

unhappy, that I had taken to drink, that I ill-treated "the sweetest little creature in the world—poor child," they said—and that our separation was about to take place any day. Indeed, these stories continued for at least five years, and at one time were a cause of great trouble, sorrow, and annoyance to us. But other people got married, and our supposed tales of woe were told of them instead, and we were forgotten and at last left alone by the delightful Mrs. Candours, who became busy elsewhere inventing the lies that seem to be the only amusement of, and breath of life to, an appalling class of people who never can let the private lives of public characters alone.

In those very early days it was a kindly thought of that fine actor, James Fernandez, to write us a letter (about the only one we received) wishing us all happiness and telling us not to mind what any one said, but to work hard. I have that letter, and we both have a great affection for the dear old gentleman who sent it.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GAIETY

"THE OTHER FELLOW" unfortunately was not a great success; and I asked Charles Brookfield, who was a member of the Court company at the time, if he would write a musical play with me on the lines of a Paris *revue*, but, instead of satirising general topics of interest, make the travesty nearly wholly theatrical. This idea he fell in with, and together we wrote what was a most impertinent, and at times rather cruel, burlesque, called "Under the Clock," which was immediately accepted by Mr. Chudleigh and proved phenomenally successful.

Brookfield appeared as Sherlock Holmes, and I played his slave of the novel, Dr. Watson, and we were supposed to be showing Emile Zola, who at that time was on a visit to London, round the various theatres. Brookfield and myself gave imitations of Henry Irving, Wilson Barrett, Beerbohm Tree, Lady Bancroft, Rose Leclercq, and no end of well-known people, slashing mercilessly at them in a way I should not dream of doing to-day. For instance, Brookfield made an entrance as Beerbohm Tree in "Hamlet," saying:—

> "I'm dressed in black because I did not go;
> These are my trappings and my suits of woe."

And lines put into the mouth of Miss Lottie Venne in her impersonation of Miss Julia Neilson were—

> "We modern girls, who don't know how to speak,
> Resort to giving imitation weak
> Of Ellen, who the gift of God inherits;
> Her faults become her pupils' only merits."

I blush to think now of my share of these daring things, and, though late in the day, I lay at the feet of the lessee of His Majesty's and the beautiful Miss Neilson my profound apologies.

Augustin Daly's company were in London at this time, playing Shakespeare at Daly's Theatre with a wonderful American accent, and I shall never forget the laugh that went up when I entered dressed in armour as Richard Cœur de Lion, and said with an American twang: "I am Richard, King of England, and don't you forget it!"

I have a letter which Lady Bancroft wrote to Brookfield expressing her delight with the production, and ending with "What a bundle of talent Hicks is! I see another Robson coming." For many years I thought her ladyship meant I was likely to be another Robson. I now can only suppose that she must have been looking out of her window and caught sight of some one who reminded her of the great little comedian walking towards her through Berkeley Square.

In this piece for the first time I sang and danced, and in doing so my whole career became altered. I had supposed that the very legitimate drama was my goal; I don't say it is not now, but singing and dancing then as the branch of work I was to stay in never entered my head. Oddly enough, too, while I was

doing this kind of work at the Court, my dear little wife had gone to the Lyceum Theatre to play Cinderella. She had never thought of musical work either, but having sung some little numbers in the "Pantomime Rehearsal," Mr. Oscar Barrett had offered her £35 a week, and she had accepted it, to play the title *rôle* in his pantomime. But pantomime was hardly the word to describe either that beautiful production or her lovely and poetic performance.

When Clement Scott saw her it moved him to write some columns which were afterwards reproduced in pamphlet form, entitled "Athwart Fairyland"; and eulogistic of her though they were, they by no means overrated her rendering of the Fairy Godmother's little charge, which was the most delightfully legitimate and sympathetic portrayal of the poor fireside maiden this or other generations will ever see. Up till now Ellaline Terriss had been playing in nothing but serious pieces at the Princess's Theatre with that magnificent drama producer, Isaac Cohen; and learning her business under the banner of Charles Wyndham, who to-day calls himself her dramatic godfather. She as understudy at the Criterion Theatre received £1 1s. a week, and played Ada Ingot in "David Garrick" on one occasion for nearly six weeks; her salary for a *matinée* at the Crystal Palace being 1s. 8*d*., on hearing of which our Squire of Dames immediately bought a ruby and diamond ring and presented it to her. Charles Wyndham, what a man to be with!

Henry Irving, at the age of 60, once said "We are all but children in art," and I suppose are still so at the age of 200. But is there anything that Charles

Wyndham does not know about acting? I very much doubt it. His stage management, which, I regret to say, I have only had the good fortune to be under once, is illuminating to watch. If a dummy is ever to act at all, Wyndham will electrify it into doing something. There are notable instances of how he has turned what looked hopeless material into very respectable artists, and his knowledge of what an audience wants in the way of plays is extraordinary. I suppose no man in our time has had so few failures, and many an author ought to say a little prayer every night for this really great and beautiful actor, who by his work on their pieces before production, and his rare art, vitality, and tremendous magnetism on the first night, has skated with a charm or a smile over the thin places, and with the quickness of his mind deceiving the audience's eyes, has conjured into success play after play that in other hands would have gone off like a squib on a damp tennis lawn.

Sometimes, however, his rehearsals are extremely trying, as he conducts them in conjunction with about a dozen other kinds of business at the same time. He is a tremendously rapid thinker and sees the thing to do at a certain moment three lines before it comes.

One day at rehearsal I counted round the prompt table, including a collie dog, nine people—costumiers, managers, stockbrokers, playwrights, decorators, etc., etc., all discussing their various business with him, while we actors were working almost on top of them on the very small stage of the Criterion. A rehearsal to sensitive people is an extremely nervous thing at any time, but when taken by Charles Wyndham it is a very

anxious affair. It was a little difficult therefore to face nine people, a dog, and Charles Wyndham, who was eating a breakfast of ham and eggs, and pointing with a fork with a piece of bacon on the end of it whenever he had to indicate the direction he wished any of us to take on the stage. The sort of conglomeration of dialogue that often took place was the following:—

Sir Charles talking as rapidly as I ever have in my life, which is saying a good deal: "Capital, my dear Hicks, capital, capital, capital—very good, but I should be a little less serious—brighter, brighter. (*A manager arrives.*) What's that? Rand mines are 6¼—buyers, that will be all right. Ask them what Jumpupfontein B's are going to. (*To an actress:*) Oh! my dear lady, no; if you wear a dress that colour what's to become of the two armchairs? We have two green satin armchairs in this scene—two armchairs, I say!! (*To one of the actors:*) Cross right, my dear fellow; go over and kiss your mother when she comes on; good. (*To a messenger:*) What's that? Tell the man to wait. Where's that bit of bacon. Oh, I've eaten it—thank you. (*To an actor:*) I say, when you take hold of a girl's hand, dear old man, do it gently; you'll never get a woman to love you if you take her hand like—— I never did—and I know; no, no! (*To a manager:*) Buy the five hundred and take a profit at once. Hi! you furniture people, why on earth do you bring curtains that colour? Do you want to frighten all the old ladies in the stalls? (*To himself:*) Now, I've dropped the egg! (*To an actor:*) No, no, kiss her, my boy, kiss her as if you meant it. (*To a furniture man:*) What a carpet! no, we won't have that! (*To an*

actor :) Take her face in your hands and tell her you want—— (*To a waiter :*) Another cup of coffee, please. (*To an actor :*) her father—— (*To a manager :*) What's that? oh! Well, sell the things. (*To the actor :*) to give his consent to——(*To a manager :*) What's that? Hang the City, I wish I'd never seen it! (*To a messenger :*) Oh, tell the lady to wait. What's that? (*To a secretary :*) No, I can't dine at Lady Crowbrough's on Tuesday. (*To an actor :*) Squeeze her, my boy, squeeze her! that's it, look lovingly into her eyes and say—— (*To a waiter :*) Another pat of butter, please. (*To an upholsterer :*) Ah, that's the colour, my boy; why didn't you bring it before? (*To an actor :*) That's it, give her the rose and exit. Capital. Come back and do it once more. Lie down, Fido. (*To a lady :*) That dog wants washing. You know I spoke about it last week."

This sort of thing occurred at one of the rehearsals of the piece in which I was playing for him, and then, to heighten the confusion, some one leant over the great light comedian's chair and began whispering. He looked up critically at me with, I imagined, a sort of "Yes-I-don't-think-much-of-him" look on his face.

This continued for a few minutes during the progress of the scene I was working at, and at last, being unable to stand it any longer, I stopped and said, "May I speak to you, Mr. Wyndham, for a moment?" "Certainly, my boy," he said, rising and coming to me, seeing something was wrong. I then told him quietly I was very nervous and that I could not possibly rehearse under these conditions, and under no circumstances would I have people discussing with him what I was doing right under my nose. I told him

that I would willingly go back a thousand times for him, and was proud to do so, but for other people *no*. And what do you think the light comedian said? Putting his hand on my shoulder, "You're mistaken, my boy, quite mistaken, they were saying you are wonderful—delightful, so fresh and bright. The only little thing they did suggest was that you are like me on the stage, just like me, so natural that sometimes the points don't carry."

It was a charming way of getting out of a difficulty, but I could not help laughing. Here was I, after having been for five years the leading light comedian at the Gaiety Theatre, being doubted as to my capacity for filling the Criterion stage; but it was charming, and very like many lines he had been accustomed to speak in "The Headless Man" and "Brighton."

But all this happened years after the "Cinderella" and "Under the Clock" days, which I will return to. My wife and I would in all probability have gone on in comedy, when suddenly, as I have said, the music in the two pieces we were playing in altered our entire arrangements. The Gaiety Theatre Company made her an offer to become their leading lady for three years at a salary of £25, £30, and £35 a week, and as her salary at the Court was only £11 and we were just starting life, this offer she gladly accepted, and with what success she appeared for them it is not necessary here to state.

On the night of the second performance of "Under the Clock" Mr. George Edwardes, who was in front, sent for me and offered me also a three years' engagement at the Gaiety at a salary of £15, £20, and £25 a

week, which I too accepted, the money I was earning then being only £8 for all performances; so things looked bright for both of us within a very few weeks of our marriage. We had an assured income of £2,500 a year for the first year alone and felt we could now face Mr. Terriss on his return from America with a certain amount of confidence.

Before we were able to open at the Gaiety Theatre we were under contract to go to America for ten weeks to play in the Lyceum pantomime "Cinderella" there. The entire production as it stood was taken over, my wife making as great a hit in New York as she had in London. I played one of the ugly sisters and made a success, being hailed as a wonderful dancer. This, of course, is not the case, but I wore skirts, and the quickness of my rustling of them took the critics' eyes off my feet. I have always been a magnificent dancer with one foot; the other one, I think, is better on the violin.

Just prior to starting for the States my wife was offered, by Henry Irving, the part of Elaine in Comyns Carr's play "King Arthur." She tried very hard to arrange matters to be able to open with the great man at the Lyceum Theatre on her return, but existing arrangements stood in the way; Mr. Tree also asked her to cancel the American trip altogether and open at His Majesty's in a play by Henry Arthur Jones, but this also she was unable to manage.

I, too, often regret I was unable to accept an offer to play the boy's part in "Robespierre" with Sir Henry Irving. I went to his rooms in Grafton Street several times about it, and I remember his saying, what was

so characteristic of him, "Perhaps my people haven't offered you enough money, eh? You are getting £30 a week, I hear. I'll give you £60." I assured him that was not the reason and that it would have been a great honour to have been on the same stage with him for nothing; but the fact was I could not get released from my then present engagement in "The Court Scandal," although I had tried desperately hard to do so.

Oddly enough, the day before we sailed my father-in-law landed from New York. We had all been corresponding every week, and so the ice was broken to some extent, though I naturally felt somewhat sheepish when I met him for the first time after having been married without his consent. However, all he said was he wished we had waited; but as everything seemed all right and his little girl was happy, that was all he cared about, and with a smile he patted me on the back and we began to discuss the excellent financial prospects the Gaiety contract gave us. William Terriss, who was known to every one as "Breezy Bill," was one of the handsomest men I have ever seen, and as an actor was unrivalled in the class of parts he played. He was the ideal hero, carrying his audience with him by his swing and dash and charm, and lifting shoulder-high any scene that he appeared in. His was a most lovable nature, one of his greatest attractions being his boyishness. In the four years—alas, all too few!—that I saw him daily, I cannot remember his ever really losing his temper with any one, and it is one of my happiest memories that, while a deep affection sprang up on my side for him, I know that he was genuinely fond of me.

The tragic manner of his death came at a time when we ourselves were in the deepest sorrow, and though time has gently smoothed that crumpled page for us, there are so many creases still left on it that 1896 is a volume we never open ; and both of us, although remembering, pretend that we forget.

And how thankful we both are that we went to the Gaiety Theatre. It is a wonderful school. It broadens your style, gives you resource, enables you to play to a vast public, and, if you are going to be successful, there is no theatre in the kingdom that gets you in closer touch with the public than does this house. And certainly in no theatre is there such an affectionate regard existing between players and audience as there is here. A Gaiety first night is one charged to the utmost with electricity, and its very intensity is unnerving. Critical beyond measure, the gallery do not take half a minute to make up their minds whether they like or dislike a thing and they signify their feelings with no uncertain voice. Where in the world are the receptions on a first night so wonderful, and where does an artist feel that peculiar longing, and wish he were able to do a bit more for the generous friends upstairs ?

The traditions of the Gaiety are guarded by the spirits of Madame Vestris, Charles Mathews, Toole, Nellie Farren, Fred Leslie, Kate Vaughan, Katie Seymour, and a dozen other masters and mistresses of their art who in times of stress and trouble have mixed tonics for the nation and given happiness and laughter to thousands of their fellow countrymen. I am very proud I played at the Gaiety, and I never

pass its stage door that I do not feel a longing to creep in, ask for my key, and go to my room to make up as I used to in the old days. But we cannot put the clock back—I wish we could—for I should dearly love to play there once again.

When I say what a cast we had there in 1903, I feel like the old actor who, earlier in these recollections, spoke of his fellow players in "Hamlet," but it was a cast indeed. The company included Harry Monkhouse, Arthur Williams, Edmund Payne, myself, John Coates, George Grossmith, Junr., and Willie Warde, Ellaline Terriss, Connie Ediss, Katie Seymour, Maria Davis and Ethel Haydon, the all-round strength of which, I venture to think, is not found to-day anywhere.

The revival of "Jack Sheppard" was the first piece we opened in, and extremely bad I was in it, following as I had to the inimitable Fred Leslie as Jonathan Wild, a part which he had made his own, and which, into the bargain, had grown old-fashioned, rhyming couplets with a pun in each line having been long out of date.

I was, however, saved from utter disaster by introducing the first American tramp character to this country. While in the States I collected all the best jokes from all the best tramp turns I saw there, and stringing them together, with a song and a big boot dance thrown in, held the stage for fifteen minutes, and effaced, I think, some of the really poor performance I had inflicted on the audience up to that point.

But I was more to be pitied than blamed. I was thrown on to the stage of our first burlesque house at the age of twenty-two to play a tremendous part, having

only once in my life ever sung a note or danced a step, and that at the little Court Theatre. It was small wonder that I was about as funny as a rabbit who has reached his earth after having run the gauntlet of a line of Cockney guns.

I remember how frightened I was before that opening night. I hardly ate anything for three days prior to it, and on the day of production itself I spent the entire afternoon sitting alone in the Brompton Oratory. Why I chose the Oratory I do not know, but my poor nerves certainly were soothed greatly by the peace and away-from-the-world feeling of that sacred building. Very few people in the audience that night would have guessed where I had been nearly all day, or what real terror had driven me there.

"The Shop Girl" followed "Jack Sheppard," and I had the good fortune to make quite a little success in it. I was lucky enough to pick up a song in America called "Her Golden Hair was hanging down her back," which materially assisted in establishing me at the Gaiety. It had been heard in England before I sang it, but had not succeeded; nor should I have made it the *furore* it was if I had not seen a little sedate woman sing it at a music-hall in New York. She rendered it in a most reserved and quiet manner, her very gentleness making all the lines appear to have, if not a *double entendre*, at least the hope, or should I rather say the fear, that things did not quite mean what they seemed.

Of the last twenty-five years, I think "Two Lovely Black Eyes," "Tarraraboomdeay," and "The Golden Hair" were the most phenomenal song successes of

their kind. My song was whistled and sung all over the country ; during the entire run of " The Shop Girl " I sang it about a thousand times, and at last fled from it, so that it was with feelings of heart failure that I arrived one summer's morning in Jersey and heard, from the silence of the little harbour, a boy whistling its chorus as he fished for whiting off the pier head.

" Her Golden Hair was hanging down her back " was the means of my having the honour to be presented for the first time to the Queen-Mother, who then, as Princess of Wales, was present one night at a ball given by Lord and Lady Cadogan at Cadogan House. My wife and myself, Miss Clara Butt and Hollman, were desired to give a small entertainment after supper had been served. Miss Butt sang beautifully, as she always does, Hollman was wonderful on his 'cello, and we played a little duologue called " Papa's Wife," which we have since acted some hundreds of times. At the conclusion of our little play, the Princess of Wales sent for me, and saying she had heard of the famous song I was singing at the Gaiety, would like to hear it.

This made me extremely uneasy. The room was full of Royalties ; the occasion was one of semi-state, and the *salons* were crowded with guests, who all stood silent while I walked down to the chairs occupied by the Princess and H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, who was also present. I had great doubts whether the words would please Her Royal Highness, as, although there was nothing shocking in them really, when sung in a theatre, I was afraid that in cold blood to a piano they might seem a little French for so select an assembly. I therefore said to the Prince of Wales :

"Perhaps, sir, Her Royal Highness might not care for the song." To which he replied most graciously: "Oh, I'm sure she would—I've heard it's very amusing indeed. Anyhow, you repeat the words to Her Royal Highness before you sing them—I'm sure they are excellent." This put me in a pretty hat. Facing rows and rows of people in uniform—ambassadors, Court dignitaries, and every conceivable kind of important personage, I stood up and recited quietly to the Princess the words of the song, without any accompaniment. If any one can conceive a more trying situation I should be greatly obliged if they would let me hear about it on reading this.

At the end of the ordeal the Prince himself laughed at me heartily, saying, "I do believe you're nervous." I said, "Sir, I'm shaking all over," and he laughed again, while the Princess, who by the way was suffering from a severe cold, and did not catch half what I had recited, most kindly said she thought the words charming, and begged me to have no misgivings but to sing, which I did at once.

The number of people who looked at me as if they could burst with laughter during the time I was solemnly reciting such classic lines as

> "Oh! Flo, what a change you know,
> When she left the village she was shy,
> But alas and alack,
> She came back
> With a naughty little twinkle in her eye"

to my future Queen was the only thing that helped me to see the humour of the situation and not sink through the floor. I have had the honour of appearing before

that great and gracious lady many times since that night, and have had many a kindly word from her, all of which are stored up in my memory, and are landmarks in my life.

It was in the old "Shop Girl," that my wife sang "Louisiana Loo"—that most popular of composers, Leslie Stuart's, first song success in London; and, looking back at this musical play, I think it was not only the first, but by far the best of its kind.

There are some musical comedies whose music may have been better, though I doubt it, and others may have had better characterisation, or a stronger plot, etc. etc., but no one other play possessed all its merits in so marked a degree. The horrible two-plaited Flapper who lisps apparently inanely for a lemon squash, a sponge cake, and a diamond necklace, all in one breath, had not then come into vogue. The feminine embroidery of a musical comedy in those days were handsome, sensible women, who, if they possessed sable coats or miniature broughams, did not go out of their way to inform you that they had found the sable coat in a third-class carriage on the Underground, or that the brougham was discovered in the area of their mother's lodging-house, "all by its little self, and so 'icky Sylvia kept it," as is the tale I have often heard told to him of the vacant laugh, the spreading elbows, the straight feet and tired expression, who is known to the division as a *nut*. If Henry II. lived to-day, he would surely have given poor Becket a miss in baulk and altered his spoken thought to "who will rid me of these pestilent flappers." I never see them at lunch, or wherever it may be, with their feet in Middlesex,

the centre portions of their body in Surrey, and their chins in Sussex, that I don't wonder to myself why on earth President Roosevelt took the trouble to go all the way to Africa to find strange beasts to shoot.

I had not been at the Gaiety long before I began to know Mr. George Edwardes very well, but not as well as I grew to know him later. He has had, and always will have, my profoundest admiration. There is no man living who can deal with any sort of theatrical problem in such a masterly manner as he can, no matter from which quarter of the compass the wind blows. As a snake, we are told, can charm a song-bird, so can he, by his knowledge of the world and perfect manners, get the very best out of those in his employ; and his loyalty to those who work for him while they are doing well is only equalled by his power to see little or no good in those who do not march with his battalions. His taste theatrically is unequalled, and while, like many of us, he may not always know what to do, he is a past master at knowing what *not* to do, which is, in our business, a most valuable asset. What I know about producing musical plays I learnt in the first instance from him, and I can say quite truly that often when I have been left alone all night in the theatre on the eve of production, faced by a difficult situation, and not knowing how to get out of it, I have mentally tried to place Mr. Edwardes in my position, and wondered what he would do were he in my shoes. His judgment of artists is unerring. I don't say this because he found me—I say it because I have not only never seen him allow any artist to attempt what he or she was incapable of, but because he always presents

them in exactly what they can do best. He is a *chef* who knows that delicate peaches are not acceptable if served with Yorkshire pudding.

"The Shop Girl" days were those of the early Lionel Monckton period. His innumerable successes I know at that time were due to the fact that he was never satisfied with his work, and, as a rule, set and reset his lyrics time and again before he passed a melody to them for the score. Poor Walter Pallant, the chairman of the Gaiety (than whom a finer judge of a tune never lived), admired the music of "Lally," as he was called, more, if possible, than we did.

My old friend Ivan Caryll came to the theatre at this time from the Lyric, and always talked about "may music" in referring to his compositions, which at first made me think he referred to music he had written in the springtime as opposed to his Christmas carols, but I discovered afterwards it was his way of referring to the fine melodies he was writing at that time.

I remember one night when he was conducting my first number in "The Shop Girl"—and what a wonderful conductor he was!—an amusing incident happened. It was on a Monday night, and on a Monday the show ladies always talked more than on any other night in the week—I suppose this being from the fact that having been away from the theatre for the week end they had many notes to compare. On this particular evening one lovely lady, who was an incorrigible talker, was relating some experience so loudly as I sang that she knocked all the words out of my head. After having said "hush!" about twenty times to no purpose, I determined to give her a lesson, and said to Caryll, "One moment,"

and the band stopped suddenly. I turned to her of the wagging tongue, and, thinking to frighten her out of her wits and stop her from ever talking again on the stage, said, "Dear lady, will you finish your story, or shall I finish my song?" Not in the least taken aback, she stepped down to my side and said, "Do you know, dearie, it's a matter of the utmost indifference to me what you do." The house laughed heartily at the way I had been scored off, and I retired with my tail between my legs, and she was the heroine of the evening.

At that time there was only one Englishman in the Gaiety orchestra, and he was always alluded to as "the foreigner." The charming Marchioness of Headfort, who is so popular across the Channel, came to the Gaiety about this time as Miss Rosie Boote, and instantly captivated everyone by her swaying reed-like movements when she danced.

CHAPTER XIV

LIGHT AND SHADOW

THE Gaiety in those days was a cauldron boiling over with youth, talent, beauty, and song. Here was that rarest of all birds, a really funny low comedian, in Edmund Payne, working with the best dancer of her kind, not excepting Genée—little Katie Seymour—she of the twinkling feet, who I am sure Mr. Payne would be the first to acknowledge was a mighty help to him in those days.

Poor little Katie Seymour! She dances no more for us, but in my heart there is a very large corner where I often see her pirouette as the Spirit of Perfection in the beautiful art of which she was so great a mistress. Where was there a better actor, apart from being a fine comedian, than Arthur Williams? Where a greater droll than Connie Ediss? a finer singer at that time in light opera than John Coates? or a quainter looking object than clever George Grossmith, Jr., with a face hardly less extraordinary than his curious legs, and a humour as unctuous as his father's at his best? It was about this time that he was christened "The Schoolgirl's Dream," or "The Hope Brothers' Beau," this latter nickname being bestowed on him from the fact that through his delightful taste in dressing he has done more to improve the garments worn by Alf, Sid Bert and Per, of the suburbs, than any artist now before the public.

But a really fine artist who, although appreciated to a great degree, has never, in my opinion, had half the praise due to him, is Willie Warde. His character sketches are Meissonier-like. He makes a marginal note on any small etching that he is given, and in a flash opens up the ordinary, daily, human and domestic side, to the man in the stalls, of the butler, fisherman, clergyman, or whatever it is he is cast to play. His pantomime is of the simplest but of the most expressive, and I never see this real artist on the stage that I do not regret his lack of voice; for, had he been able to speak—and by that I mean carry through a long part—in dialogue, he would have been the Got of our theatre life and a figure very large in the public eye. He has invented more funny business for other comedians than any one dreams of, and the success of "The Geisha" was largely due to him, for it was he who invented the part of the Chinaman, which was only a thumb-nail sketch on the afternoon of the dress rehearsal, when the piece looked hopeless through lack of comedy and was postponed for a fortnight.

"The Shop Girl" proved such a tremendous success that just before the end of its London run arrangements were made for practically the whole of the younger members of the original company, including myself, to go over to New York with it. My wife, who had been lent by the Gaiety Company for a little time to play in "His Excellency," W. S. Gilbert and Osmund Carr's opera at the Lyric Theatre, was also sent over to America to appear in that piece, she opening at the Broadway Theatre simultaneously with my opening at Palmer's Theatre there.

Both the plays, unfortunately, failed to attract as had been hoped, "The Shop Girl" especially failing owing to a great many of the lines in it having been brought back from New York on a previous occasion by me, the jokes thereby becoming Newcastle coals re-shipped to Newcastle. England was having trouble with the United States at that time, and on the first night of our piece a humorist said in the foyer, "It's true we're going to war with England over Venezuela, but why send us 'The Shop Girl.'"

"His Excellency" did not seem to please the New York public either, but they seemed to appreciate a song my wife sang out of "An Artist's Model" called "Umpty umpty ay," which the management put into the second act and to which she used to sing about six topical encore verses.

It is so many years ago that I dare now tell how John Le Hay, who played the part of the syndic in "His Excellency," used to change into his evening clothes between the acts of the opera and give his ventriloquial entertainment and get roars of laughter with his little doll that kept repeating "Rotton Cotton Gloves." Whether the New York public took him for a Greek Chorus, or thought that they were seeing a triple bill, I have never been able quite to make up my mind.

It was at this time that I first met Charles Frohman, with whom later I was to become so closely associated. When I arrived in New York there was a regular campaign against me, I being accused of taking all the gags and songs I could lay my hands on; and it was here I was christened "Stealmore Bricks." It is true that any good joke I heard I annexed; but who hasn't?

And why I should be blamed alone of all the comedians who have visited that hospitable shore, from the time Fred Leslie became an international theatrical robber, I really don't know. As regards music, I never in my life took a number without the permission of the publishers there or their agents here, and, through singing them, put hundreds of pounds in their pockets and never once made a farthing myself. I thought, as I have this opportunity, I would like to say this to clear up a matter which has long been misrepresented.

Many of the newspapers had such headlines as this: "Comedians beware—Seymour Hicks is in town—Padlock your gags," or "Nail everything you have: Hicks the real live bunco man is among you." At many places of amusement my money was refused, but I always got in; for my wife, who was not very well known in New York at this time, would buy two tickets, and while the managers were arguing with me, hand me her other coupon, and I followed her in, I am bound to say much to the amusement of the managers themselves, who were sportsmen enough to appreciate slimness in other people.

One comedian came on at a *matinée* and said, during his scene, "We are not doing it all to-day—Hicks is listening," and when Lockhart's elephants came on he put his head round the corner of the stage and said, "Guess you cannot take anything from them."

At a performance I attended in which that inimitable soubrette Miss May Irwin was playing, she likewise had many little jokes at my expense, and at last I was ungallant enough to score off her, for at the end

of a musical number for which she got several encores, she looked up to my box, and saying, "Well, how do you like that?" I replied, "Not at all, Miss Irwin!" The house laughed very much, and she joined in. She was a delight to watch, and was quite the finest female low comedian I have ever seen.

While in New York on this visit I saw the farce "A Night Out," which had been refused by all the English managers. I begged Mr. Frohman to let me take it back to London, which he did. I produced it at the Vaudeville for Messrs. Gatti and George Edwardes, and running 600 nights in London it cleared in town and provinces £32,000 profit.

Talking of annexing American gags, I heard a funny story of George Grossmith, Junr., who, it appears, has followed my example pretty closely. In a piece he played in, called "Fluffy Ruffles," in America, before the production of "Our Miss Gibbs" here, he wisely, I understand, annexed all the best gags of the comedian who played opposite him, and inserted them into his part in "Miss Gibbs" in London. The manuscript of "Miss Gibbs" reached New York recently, and the comedian who played opposite Grossmith in "Fluffy Ruffles" was cast for the part Grossmith plays in "Miss Gibbs." When he received his part he smiled, and wrote one line to the manager: "Dear Sir, do you want me to learn all this over again?"

George Cohan, the well-known American actor, author, singer, and dancer, did much the same to me, for when he was asked to Americanise "The Beauty of Bath" that I wrote, he returned the MS. with a note just saying: "Sorry, but I have written this twice

before myself." He hadn't, but that's a detail. By the way, before leaving this subject, I don't want it to be thought that American comedians do not annex our English songs and jokes—they take all they can get! They despise English humour, I know, but they do just the same as little Willie does, and quite right, too!

On our return from New York we went to spend a few days with Mr. W. S. Gilbert. One morning at breakfast he read aloud from the morning paper the life story of Captain Dreyfus and the description of his degradation on parade and his journey to Devil's Island. When he had finished he said, "Fancy if that man were innocent! What a drama! and what a wonderful scene the degradation would make! Now then, Hicks, there's a ready-made melodrama for you; why don't you write it?"

Jumping at the idea, I sat down the next morning and in seven weeks had finished a four-act drama, which I called "One of the Best." I read it to my father-in-law, diffidently telling him I had designed the part for him, and he at once made an appointment for me to read it to the Messrs. Gatti, with a view to its production at the Adelphi Theatre. I shall never forget the ordeal I went through in reading the manuscript to the late Mr. Agostino Gatti and his son, my old friend Rocco Gatti. Rocco was a lad younger than I was, and said little, and the old gentleman, a man of vast theatrical experience and knowledge, sat silent as I wandered on through the manuscript, act after act, and made no comment of any kind until I had finished the last page. I was about to apologise for having taken up so much of Mr. Gatti's time, feeling sure he had not liked

it, when he rose from his chair, took his hat, held out his hand, and said, "We do it"—that was all—and walked away down the staircase and along the Strand with his hands clasped behind him as was his custom. I never felt such a thrill as those three little words gave me, for Agostino, as all the Gattis are, was a man of his word, and I knew my play would be produced even if he should repent of his decision. I am glad to say, however, he believed in the piece, and his judgment was correct, for it was a tremendous success and ran for over a year at his theatre, in 1895—6.

It may appear to the reader that I am not saying half enough about my beautiful partner in these reminiscences and a great deal too much about myself, but the fact is my wife is very shortly bringing out a little book of reminiscences of her own, so I am purposely not saying a quarter that I ought about her in these pages, or I should be poaching upon her preserves. If I followed my own inclinations I should do nothing but write about her in her private life, for her acting is the least good thing she does, and I can say this, for I know her to be a pretty head and shoulders above the rest of her contemporaries.

Constant visitors to the Gaiety at this time were the then Master of the Rolls and Lady Esher, who not only honoured us with their friendship, but were kindness itself. I first became acquainted with his lordship through an act on his part which reads more like a fairy tale in these matter-of-fact days than anything else. By chance we took a large house and grounds at Winkfield, near Ascot, for eighteen months. At the expiration of that period we received a notification

from a firm of solicitors that we must repair the house, outbuildings and stables, and set the grounds of fourteen acres in order, and that Lord Esher's agent would call on us to discuss what was necessary. We were quite at a loss to understand what this meant until we learned that the original lease granted by Lord Esher to the tenant who had sublet to us was for a term of twenty years, and that we had unknowingly taken over the last eighteen months of this contract, and with it all the penalties it carried, such as replanting trees, etc., etc. This was an awful facer, as we had little or no ready money, and the cost would exceed, we were informed, at the least £800 or £1,000. We were worrying what we had better do, when, a few days after the visit of Lord Esher's agent, I received a letter from that fine old gentleman himself. It was this :—

"DEAR MR. HICKS,—I am informed that you have taken over the fag-end of a twenty years' lease of one of my properties. I can only conceive that the solicitor who allowed you to do such a thing is either a rogue or an arrant fool. In either case I feel that it would not be honest of me to take advantage of the inexperience of a young couple who work so hard for their money, and who give Lady Esher and myself so much pleasure in their acting. I therefore wish you to take this letter as a full indemnity against all and any conditions my lease may hold, and to understand that I will take over the estate myself from you and make the necessary arrangements for restoration."

The letter continued on other topics, and we learned

from it for the first time that the old lady and gentleman who always sat in the front row of the stalls at the *matinées* were the big-hearted owners of the house in which we lived.

There is not much need for me to enlarge on the wonderful generosity of this act; the letter speaks for itself. We, of course, journeyed off at once to tender our grateful thanks, and our meeting over a business matter was the means of our being allowed to add our humble names to the long list of personal friends of those two distinguished people.

When the run of "The Shop Girl" came to an end, a piece called "My Girl" followed it. It was not a success, and I was glad not to be in it, as the part I was offered was an extremely poor one, and having long realised that good briefs make successful barristers, I knew that in the same way the most unwise thing an actor can do if he can possibly help it is to appear in parts that are not of the best after he has once made his little hit with the public.

"The Circus Girl" came next, which was another "Shop Girl," running for about six hundred performances. In this I had a good part. On the first night I sang a song called "She never did the same thing twice." It was a very ordinary song, and before I had got halfway through the second verse a boy in the gallery called out to me, "Seymour." I looked up, and he said "Granted." I said, "Eh?" He said, "Granted, old boy," and, bowing politely, I took the hint, finished as quickly as I could, and I never sang the song again. In the second act of this play one of the principal characters made an entrance into the

circus on a white horse. The animal had originally been a bus horse, and the only way we could get it to start was to call out: "Charing Cross, Strand, Bank, Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Street!" slam the green-room door, and say "Right behind!" and it would then trot on as happily as it did no doubt in its days of penny fares.

I received one of the very few presents I have ever had from anonymous donors during the run of this piece. One day, on a Saturday afternoon, when I arrived for the *matinée* performance, I found that a small package had been left for me at the stage-door by a cabman. I opened it, and to my amazement discovered that it contained a silver cigarette-case, in which were seven £100 Bank of England notes. Engraved on the inside of the case was a simple line: "From Box J. Seventy-one times." That was all. To this day I don't know who the donor was, but I do remember seeing a very pretty lady in black, whom I did not know, continually in a private box, and whom, after the arrival of this wonderful present, I never saw again. I mention this incident because I believe it is a popular belief that actors are always receiving presents and love-letters from the front of the theatre. I personally do not think this is so; at least, they have been very few in my case. But after all, that may be no criterion, as my face is not my strong point.

It was during the run of "The Circus Girl" that my wife and myself had the honour of being commanded by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to come to supper after the performance at the house of a lady and gentleman we knew and whom he was honouring with his presence. When we arrived we found we were two

of a party of only six, and the evening was one of the most delightful it has ever been our lot to spend anywhere. I kept a cigar the Prince gave me that night as a memento of an evening never to be forgotten. After supper my wife was asked to sing, and she went to the piano to play her accompaniment to her famous song, "A little bit of string." His Royal Highness came and sat next her chair, and this so disconcerted her that during the second verse every word went out of her head and for the life of her she could not remember a single syllable. The Prince was immensely amused at her embarrassment, and laughed considerably. Later in the evening she managed the difficult feat of remembering the words of a song she was singing every evening, and had sung some three hundred times, for the great playgoer and patron of all forms of theatrical entertainment.

I cannot speak of the Gaiety without referring to a most amusing old character who was stage-door keeper, by the name of Tierney. He had formerly been a sea captain, and managed the stage-door much as he must have done his ship; he wore a long beard, and I don't think had ever been seen to laugh. A smile that sometimes flickered across his face when I teased him was one more of self-pity than of merriment. He had a habit of saying "I say, I say" before and after everything. If you asked for your letters he would reply, "I say, I say, I have no letters for you, I say, I say," and he spoke to all and sundry alike, whether he were a scene-shifter or "one of the Jew-nosed stage-doorée" who waited patiently for "her of the silken tights" to go out to supper with him.

It is really a wonderful thing what receptive natures some women have, and how thoroughly French they become through simply dining once in the French capital. I remember standing at the stage-door on a Monday evening and seeing one of our beautiful ladies jump out of a hansom. She had been to Paris for the first time on the previous Sunday morning, seen a play there, and had returned *at once*. But she was Parisienne to her finger-tips, and, walking up to old Tierney, said, "Ah! voulez vous donner le fiarker un frank—from le gare de Charing Cross." Tierney waited for a moment, and said, with a look I shall never forget, "'Ere, I say, give him a bob and have done with it, I say, I say; give him a bob, I say." The catching of an accent is no doubt an easy thing though. It is on record that an actor meeting another whom he had not seen for a month noticed that his friend had acquired in that time the broadest American accent possible. "Good Heavens!" he said, "I didn't know you had been away to America." "I haven't," came the reply, "but I have had an offer."

It was during "The Circus Girl" that we had the profound and abiding sorrow of losing our little infant son, and it was while my wife lay at death's door herself that her father met his tragic end. All this terrible trouble happened simultaneously, and it was some time before she was able to face the ordeal of returning to the stage. The scene of enthusiasm when she did so I shall never forget. The whole house rose to their feet and cheered and cheered again, and waved to her, calling her by name, their sympathy causing her, after a brave effort, to break down completely. I

think it was only her evident distress caused by this outburst of genuine affection that made the ovation she received fade away, as it was obvious that its whole-heartedness was more than her little body could bear. The applause lasted just two minutes and a half, which is a reception of unprecedented length. The British public are wonderful masters, and I am grateful to be their servant. God bless them! A few months after this my wife saw and fell in love with the sweetest of little Irish girls, and we adopted her, calling her Mabel. To-day she is a sweet and gentle girl of eighteen, and is loved by us as if she were our own, and well she deserves to be.

CHAPTER XV

FROM CLAPHAM TO BELGRAVIA

During these long runs I had been writing plays steadily, one of the most successful being a drama called "Sporting Life," written in collaboration with my old friend Cecil Raleigh. It has been acted all over the world to immense business, with the exception, oddly enough, of London, the very city it was designed for. It dealt with sport in all its forms, but more especially with boxing. The great scene of the piece was laid in the National Sporting Club on the night of a big fight, when the hero, Lord Woodstock, was supposed to knock out the champion of England, and in doing so retrieve his fortune and estates. A real pugilist played the fighting man in the drama, and laid himself open purposely to be hit about and ultimately floored, much to the delight of the audience, who always cheered wildly when they saw the hero triumphant. But when the piece was presented for a week at the Deptford Theatre, which suburb had the honour to be the home of the aforesaid pugilist actor, personal vanity got the better of the professor of the noble art, and ruined our play on the Saturday night most successfully.

It appeared that during the entire engagement the boxer's friends in the neighbourhood had been taunting him by saying that he was "no class" to allow himself

to be punched about every night by an actor—that he was lowering himself in his profession, and ought to be ashamed of himself. He brooded over this for about five days, and on the sixth, after the *matinée*, having drunk not wisely but too much, invited his friends to come to the gallery that night and "he'd show them." Of course, this was all unknown to us. The big scene opened quietly as usual, but when the fight proper commenced it became obvious that something was amiss—the pugilist, instead of obeying orders and "coming closer" as he was directed, and always did, to be well punched, sparred up to the actor playing the part of Lord Woodstock as he would have done had he been at the National fighting for a purse. Bang, bang, came the blows on the unfortunate hero's head, a right and left and a kidney-punch following each other like lightning, accompanied by enthusiastic cries of "Well done, 'Arry!" from the gallery. The actor saw that things were wrong, but knowing the play would be ruined if he jumped out of the ring, gamely stuck to the unequal contest, which, however, did not last long, for the pugilist, stepping in quickly, struck him a violent blow which sent our hero to the floor, holding his stomach, in great pain. The curtain fell to shouts of laughter as the actor playing the referee said, not knowing what else to say, "His lordship is the winner," which was the usual curtain line, but hardly appropriate on this night, with an elated prize-fighter standing over a defeated nobleman, who sat bolt upright rubbing what is known to the faculty as his "bread-basket."

"Sporting Life" was originally produced at the

Shakespeare Theatre, Clapham. It was in seventeen scenes, many of them being big full-stage sets, and in addition to the company some hundred supers were employed. I was playing at the Gaiety while I was producing it, and I remember it gave me some of the hardest work I have ever had. On the Saturday before the Monday on which it saw the light I rehearsed the crowds in the morning, and then played the *matinée* and night performances at the Gaiety, taking a cab from there directly the curtain fell over to the Clapham Theatre, arriving there at about 12.15 midnight. The effects of the company who had been playing there during the week were taken out, and at 1.30 we began getting in all our new scenery, which had to be made into packs and fitted together. By hard work through the night we managed to rough our whole production together by twelve on the Sunday morning, and then we commenced getting all the furniture and accessories into their various positions. At three in the afternoon I commenced lighting the scenes, which took me till seven in the evening, when the band arrived and went through the incidental music of the play with me (which, by the way, my wife had written). At 8.30 we set the first act and began the dress rehearsal proper. The production was of the most elaborate kind, having eight racehorses in it and all kinds of effects. We rehearsed on and on through the night, and when we got to the racecourse scene in the last act I was shouting at the supers, trying to get them to put more ginger into the wrecking of a gipsy van where one of the villains had concealed himself, when my collaborator, Cecil Raleigh, tapped me on the

arm and said, "Old man, do you know what time it is?" I said "No." He said "It's a quarter to eight!" Of course I immediately sent the company to their homes, and had to leave the last two scenes to chance when the night came. I had breakfast with the stage hands at a local public-house, and told them that if they would stay on and work through the day they could have twenty pounds if things went smoothly at night, and, they agreeing, we returned to the theatre, setting and resetting the scenes, going through the lights and the band cues again and ringing the curtain up and down as it should fall to be effective.

By this time it was about four in the afternoon, and everyone was dismissed for a couple of hours' rest prior to the raising of the curtain on the performance. What happened to me I don't know; all I remember was being awakened by a programme-seller in the stalls where I had fallen asleep, having slipped down between the rows. It was seven o'clock — the public were coming into the theatre, and I must have lain there like the Sleeping Beauty for two or three hours!

I did not play that night at the Gaiety, but superintended the stage at Clapham throughout the evening, doing all I could to keep the production running smoothly. During the performance a crowd of people some hundreds strong assembled round the stage-door to watch the racehorses being taken in and out of the theatre, and were making such a noise that they nearly spoiled the quiet scenes in progress on the stage. In vain I had appealed to them again and again to keep quiet, and I was at my wits' ends to know what to do, when suddenly I remembered I had twelve supers who

were dressed as policemen for the Derby Day scene. I collected them together, marched them through the stage-door with drawn truncheons, gave them an order to disperse the mob, and in less time than it takes to tell, the sight of these stalwarts in blue tunics caused the roughs to bolt, and quiet was instantly restored. I wonder what those good Claphamites would have done if they had known that my officers of the law were only extra people at a shilling a night!

The play was really an enormous success, and when the curtain fell the applause was loud and long. But the production being a suburban one, there were not the usual calls for "Author!" as there always are in a West-end theatre. But as the public continued to cheer and cheer without seeming to want anybody in particular, I ran round to the back of the pit, and pushing my way in began calling out at the top of my voice "Hicks! Hicks!! Raleigh! Hicks!! Hicks!!!" The house took up the cry enthusiastically, and I had time to get round on to the stage again, and, blushing like a school-girl, led Cecil Raleigh on before the curtain to take the huge call I had manufactured myself!

Ah! those were the days when one was working like a dog to try and succeed. I wonder if I should do it now? I think so, though I should think twice about running round to the pit. But no work is too hard on a first night, and many a play is saved and made by the company and the scene hands seeing their manager with his coat off working with them. This has always been my custom. But one doesn't want a production like "Sporting Life" more than about once a week, for I had been in the theatre exactly sixty hours.

There happened to be a large firm of furniture people who helped me greatly on this occasion, called Levi (they have since retired rich people, I am glad to say), but go now by the name of MacDonald, having as a crest an Elizabethan four-poster with grouse rampant on its plush hangings and a motto beneath of "Value before Valour."

A well-known old actor of bygone days, by name John Coleman, was present at our first night at Clapham, and in his old-fashioned, pedantic way came round at the conclusion of the performance with outstretched hand and many congratulations for the younger generation, who, as he put it, "were hewing their way like knights of old through mighty opposition to dizzy heights of Excelsiorean glory!" He was a great character, was John Coleman, and gilded every picture so lavishly that the ordering of a cup of tea and an egg by him sounded like the giving of directions for a feast of Lucullus. It is told of him that once, when he was playing Hamlet at Coventry to an almost empty house, he stopped short in one of his soliloquies and addressed the only male occupant of the dress circle. It appears that this gentleman sat in his seat during the two first acts reading a newspaper and taking no notice whatever of John Coleman's delineation of the moody Dane. Catching sight of him, and becoming exasperated at what he considered a gross insult to himself, Coleman stepped down to the footlights and said, "Ladies and Gentleman,—I cannot do justice to the Immortal Bard if that gentleman in the circle continues to devour contemporaneous literature." The gentleman thus addressed immediately got up and left the theatre

and went home, but returned for the third act, armed with a telescope, which he fixed on John Coleman at once, and, indeed, never removed from him for the rest of the entire performance.

John Coleman, I believe, used to get extremely poor notices for his Hamlet; but I doubt if he ever had a crueller, though exceedingly funny, one than Wilson Barrett did in a London paper, when he first appeared as the hero of the Denmarkian mirth-provoker at the Princess's Theatre. E. S. Willard was playing the King, his brother, George Barrett, the Gravedigger, Miss Eastlake Ophelia, and, if I remember rightly, Cooper Cliff Laertes. A critic, after speaking of the production itself, praised Barrett to the skies, saying all sorts of most laudatory things about his performance. He continued in this strain for nearly half a column, ending his notice by writing: "His brother Wilson also was by no means bad." George Barrett, of course, was a magnificent Gravedigger—the best I have ever seen—but it was a shocking, if amusing, way of holding the one brother up to ridicule, who had been on the stage all night, by giving half a column to the other who had played as the Digger—only a shadow in the tragedy.

Wilson Barrett's Hamlet did not show any great thought, but it was a fine virile performance, that appealed to the pit and gallery; and though William of Stratford may not have conceived so full-blooded and declamatory a Dane, he certainly would rather have seen him than some of the limp backboneless slayers of Polonius that we are so often treated to nowadays. It was the custom, I think, rather to belittle the talents

which Wilson Barrett possessed, because of a somewhat affected manner of speech and a *penchant* for opening his ballet shirts at the neck, much in the same way that the modern woman courts pneumonia in evening dress. But he was a man, and, despite his little vanities, a fine type of Englishman, who fought his way bravely in the days of his adversity, holding his head high and living to pay off heavy debts, all incurred in his business; and, in the end, not only weathering the storm, but amassing a goodly fortune. No one who has ever been under his flag has anything but affectionate thoughts for him. He was always most polite and kind to me.

Harry Wright, his manservant, was a great card in his way, with his long, curly, black hair, and his habit of selling cheap jewellery in the theatre. Barrett sometimes used to find fault with him, which made the ubiquitous Wright sulk for a few hours after being reprimanded. Such an occasion as this occurred prior to the first night of "Claudian," a drama of ancient Rome, in which Barrett played a part after his own heart, being dressed in pink flesh-coloured tights, bare arms with jewelled armlets and chains, and a very low-cut silken overshirt. Wright had elaborately curled his master's hair in quantities of ringlets—a mode of *coiffure* which Wilson Barrett affected whenever possible. Forgetting that Wright was in an ill-humour, he, at the conclusion of his dressing, rose and surveyed himself admiringly in the glass, and turned to Wright, expecting the usual compliments due from man to master. Wright, however, looked on the vision of beauty unmoved.

"Well, Wright," said Barrett, "and how do I look?"

The servant made no reply.

"Come, come, Wright, my man, tell me! How do I look?" said Barrett, throwing himself back in a gladiator-like pose.

"Well," said Wright, getting a bit of his own back, as he thought—for Barrett really looked extremely well. "Well, so help me gawd, guv'nor, you looks all 'ead!"

The stories of George Barrett used to be legion, but the best one I have heard of that ripe old low comedian was on the first night of "Claudian," when he gagged against the express orders of his managerial brother. The run of "The Silver King" and other modern melodramas had just concluded, and George Barrett, who had played all the low comedy parts, had in this Roman drama, of course, the best humorous character assigned to him, but being more or less in the picture it appeared to him that it would be as difficult to create laughter in a toga as it would be to be funny on a pound a week, and so he set about modernising the humour as best he could. His brother Wilson, seeing his attempts at rehearsal to work for modern laughter in a play of ancient times, told him to speak the book, and not under any circumstances to interpolate anything of his own. The first night arrived, and Wilson, again calling George aside, reminded him to be strictly legitimate and not to disobey his instructions. It must therefore have been a bitter blow to Wilson, after having raised the audience to a pitch of excitement by the great earthquake effect in that play, when temples fell one upon another, and the stage was a mass of ruins, to hear George enter in the next scene, which was a front one, and reply to one of the characters as

to the condition of the ruined city. George, dressed in his toga and sandals, with his patrician's brow surmounted by a wreath, said, "Yus, it is orful, ain't it? But what's worrying me is not so much the condition of the public buildings as what 'as happened to my five white mice!" This delighted the audience, and remained permanently in the play, as did many other remarks of a like kind.

Wilson Barrett used to tell an amusing story against himself. At a time when he had a lot of workmen redecorating his private residence, thinking to give them a treat, he asked them if, after work one evening, they would all like to have seats to come and see him play in "The Lights of London" at the Princess's. They said they didn't mind if they did, and being given complimentary tickets, all went to witness on a Saturday night their employer's production. At the end of the week Barrett's eye caught sight, on the pay sheet, of an item against each workman's name, which read: "Saturday night. Four hours' overtime at Princess's Theatre, 8s."

I used to go to the theatre a great deal while I was at the Gaiety, and on one occasion went up to the St. James's to see Claude Carton's delightful comedy, "Liberty Hall." I arrived at the box-office, and before I could open my mouth the acting-manager and his assistants began falling over each other in their endeavour to please me. "Heavens!" I thought, "I am a greater success than I fancied!" "What would you like," they inquired—"a box or stalls?" I thanked them, and said that as I was alone a stall would do splendidly, and this was readily given to me.

I said how much obliged I was, and was walking to my seat when an usher stopped me, saying "'Ere, they've made a mistake; they thought you were Haddon Chambers, the author. Give me back that ticket—an upper circle will do for you!" And to the upper circle I gladly went.

Haddon Chambers and myself, I believe, are supposed to be considerably alike—I hope he won't be offended by my saying so! Many a time have beautiful women and rich-looking men come up to me with beaming faces and said: "Why, Haddon, fancy meeting you—Oh! I beg your pardon!" the smile vanished and I had to pay for my own lunch that day.

Life is full of disappointments of this kind: which reminds me of the wealthy suitor who married a famous opera singer who did not look in the early morning anything like what she looked on the stage at night. The wealthy husband woke, his eyes met his wife's, and, realising the difference for the first time between her face on and off the stage, he said to her, "*Oh! For heaven's sake, sing!*" History does not relate whether the lady said "I will," as she had replied in church but a few hours before, or whether her husband was a violent-tempered man who, like that matrimonial enthusiast Mr. Deeming, made a hobby of burying his various wives under the dining-room fireplace; perhaps she sang and he forgave. Of Deeming it was wittily said that "he married in haste and cemented at leisure."

My wife and I during the early Gaiety days used sometimes to accept engagements after the performance at smart evening parties, either to sing or play little

duologues. But we soon stopped doing so, for, although we often received a hundred guineas for the evening, the agony of mind that one has to endure, performing in a drawing-room, right on top of Lady This and Something That, all talking at the tops of their voices, is a thing that the Bank of England cannot compensate one for—(*can't it!*). Everybody was, of course, very kind and considerate, but it was impossible to do justice to oneself, under these circumstances, however modest one's pretensions. I remember on one summer's night we were playing before H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge at a house in Upper Grosvenor Street. The drawing-room, which was not a very large one, had long windows, all of which were thrown wide open on account of the heat, and consequently the noise of the street traffic made it extremely difficult to make oneself heard, and, added to that, our difficulty in passing each other in the very limited space of about six square feet, surrounded entirely by the whole of Debrett, reduced us to such a state that we never went out professionally again. Our little play proceeded much in this way:—

"Ah! Mr. Singleton, so you have come home at last?"

Footman at front door ("Lady Snodgrass's carriage blocks the way").

"Yes; do you think I've changed?" "No, I should have——"

Same footman ("Now then, come, hurry up, No. 10").

"Known you anywhere, and your mother? "Oh, she has gone, to——"

Same footman ("Hanover Square carriages set down on the left").

And so on through the entire entertainment. Money bought at that price is not worth the creditors it goes to pay.

Once, and only once, did we meet with any rudeness in our private professional engagements, and that was from a magnificent person in the shape of an under-under-deputy-assistant groom of the chambers at the Duke of Newcastle's. It was on the occasion of her Grace opening a new ball-room at her London house, when everyone of note in Society was invited. I had had the pleasure of knowing the Duke for quite a long time, and had continually met with the greatest kindness and consideration at his hands, and I looked forward to place my humble powers at his disposal.

On arrival at the front door I walked into the hall, and my friend the magnificent one said:

"Name, if you please."

I said I had come there to — er —, I did not quite know how to put it; this bird of paradise's eye seemed to transfix me.

"To what?" asked he, with a look which was a cross between a cold rice pudding and a sleepy crocodile.

"To — er — appear this evening," I murmured, "for the Duke of Newcastle."

"Oh!—one of the actors?" he sneered. Oh!!! "*The others* are in the cloak-room. I'll send for the groom of the chambers."

The hall was crowded with people going upstairs who stared us out of countenance, as is the wont of a really well-bred crowd, and footmen and servants jostled each other attending to their wants and ushering them up to the first floor. We, with no one

to show us where to go, found ourselves in a big dining-room among some forty footmen in gorgeous liveries. I remember counting them at the time. They looked us up and down, and after waiting there for some time I again had to say to another imperial personage what my errand was, by this time getting very nervous at the humiliating way these people can treat one if they choose. I was informed that Mr. Somebody would tell Mr. Somebody to tell Mr. Somebody. We waited and waited, and at last, fearing that the hour would pass when we were needed with the other artists upstairs, I went again into the hall, and seeing my first bird of paradise told him that he must have me shown upstairs at once. He replied it wasn't his business to announce the artists, but that it was the groom of the chambers' duty, and he wasn't to be found. By this time I had lost my temper completely under the peculiarly trying circumstances of standing about with my wife being eyed by a lot of flunkeys; and going up to my friend I told him in excellent English—the phrasing not being altogether modelled on Chesterfield's letters to his son—that I should remain no longer, and as I was a personal friend of the Duke's I should call next day and report him for his insolence. I was putting on my coat and we were about to leave when the Duke himself came down to inquire if anything had been heard of us. I explained the situation, saying we had been there for half an hour, and that no one would take the trouble to announce us. He was extremely vexed, and, showing us the way, himself discharged my bird of paradise on the spot, which was an excellent thing

to have done, as he was one of those impertinent ruffians who can make a situation very unpleasant when youth is without that faithful ally, experience.

With the end of the run of "The Circus Girl" my agreement with the Gaiety Company was up, and though I had a very flattering offer to remain with them, I accepted an engagement with Mr. George Edwardes under his private contract.

Before leaving the Gaiety Company's management, however, I signed an agreement to write the next piece for them to follow "The Circus Girl." This I did in collaboration with Harry Nicholls. It was called "A Runaway Girl." It was very successful, and ran about the same length of time as "The Circus Girl," these three plays between them totalling roughly some sixteen hundred performances. It was in "A Runaway Girl" that I hit upon the idea of the octette which became so famous as "Follow the Man from Cook's." This, of course, was due to the splendid tune to which Lionel Monckton set Adrian Ross's capital lyric.

I had written a quantity of pieces by now, but I will content myself by making marginal notes of them for personal reference, as I don't suppose these statements of fact recording success and failure are of much interest to any one but myself. The first piece I opened in under Mr. Edwardes' management was "The Dovecot," at the Duke of York's Theatre, with a cast which included, as leading lady, Miss Ellis Jeffreys. The play was a comedy taken from the French, and ran for some 150 performances. Miss Jeffreys, who is a perfect delight to act with, made a very great success in it, as did my old friend James Welch, who was inimitable

as my father-in-law. He is the only man I have ever played with who has the effect of making me laugh the moment I begin to act a scene with him, and on one or two occasions in "The Dovecot" I laughed so much that I was glad to leave the stage. From the Duke of York's I went to the Court Theatre, this time as leading man, with a tremendous part in "The Court Scandal," that of the young Duc de Richelieu. The production was singularly charming, the play was a great success, and after a run at the Court was transferred to the Garrick Theatre. The part of the Little Duke was extraordinarily difficult, demanding, as it did, experience, extreme youth, power, comedy, and grace—in fact, almost all the resources of the actor's art. Dion Boucicault worked hard with and for me, and helped me to scramble through a very difficult task without disgracing the ancestor of the Great Cardinal. There were many excellent performances in this production, but one stands out above them all—that of the old Abbé de la Touche, as played by that finest of old actors, James Beveridge.

"Dot" Boucicault, who had the good fortune to marry one of my oldest friends, the inimitable "Sophie Fulgarney," is in the first flight of play producers, and is masterly in his detail and power of helping not only the novice, but the most experienced of actors, at rehearsal. It is a great pleasure to work with him, for he is a living example of how unnecessary it is to shout and make a noise in directing artists, and his gentle methods and charming "bedside manner" would make the fortune of the most incompetent Harley Street practitioner that ever lived (*if there is such a thing*).

CHAPTER XVI

THE VAUDEVILLE

My wife continued to play at the Gaiety in "A Runaway Girl," though her yearly contract had long expired; and it was at the end of about five years of constant appearances at the Gaiety that we decided it would be a wise step for her to say good-bye to that most delightful of theatres, and join forces with me under Charles Frohman's banner, and so create a combination which would perhaps give us a trade-mark of our own.

Her parting with her comrades there, of whom, one and all, she was so fond, was a great wrench to her; and among her most affectionately guarded treasures are the presents she received from them on her last performance, including as they did mementoes from the chorus ladies and gentlemen and the staff of the house, as well as the principals, all accompanied by round-robins signed by every one, including even the names of the call-boy and stage-door keeper, wishing her success and happiness in her new departure.

She received 290 telegrams that night from the public wishing her good luck, and she sent to the hospitals four cabfuls of flowers which had fallen at her feet on that, to her, most memorable evening.

We opened under Mr. Frohman's management at the Criterion (1899), in an English version of "Ma Bru," the

great Odéon success, and called it "My Daughter-in-Law." It was very slight and was a success, a great deal, I think, owing to the fact that the cast it was given was a magnificent one, including as it did such artists as Fanny Brough, Alfred Bishop, Henry Kemble, Vane Tempest, Herbert Standing, C. P. Little, and Cynthia Brooke, all of whom scored heavily, as did my wife in a part that fitted her like a glove. This was the piece that Charles Wyndham produced himself, and to which I made reference earlier in these Recollections.

During the run of "My Daughter-in-Law," His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, having seen the play in Paris, came to the Criterion one evening, and graciously sent for us to his box after the second act. He very kindly said how delighted he was with the splendid company, but began chaffing my wife for having forsaken singing and dancing, and ended his little pleasantries by making his guests and ourselves laugh in saying, "Hicks, can't you go out and get a piano, so that she can sing something in the next act? If you don't, I really can't stay. The idea of Miss Terriss not singing a song! I must go, I really must," and he laughed heartily. He was in excellent spirits and the best of tempers that night, and seemed to infect everyone about him with his good humour. What a magnetic personality he had, and how good to our profession! We would willingly have tried to stand on our heads if it would have given him a moment's pleasure.

One little incident concerned with His Royal Highness that evening amused the audience as well as those of us

who were on the stage. He at times had a habit of talking rather loudly in a theatre, and a burst of laughter dying away somewhat suddenly that night, his voice rang out clearly all over the house, saying, "Charming! and hasn't she got a fascinating lisp." And I think Miss Terriss lisped more than ever through her scenes, made conscious, shall I say, of her charm or her impediment by the words of the first gentleman in these islands or indeed anywhere else.

The Boer War was in full swing at this time, and we played at over twenty-four *matinées* for charities in connection with the sick and wounded. The biggest *matinée* we organised was one at the Albert Hall (December 6, 1899) for the wives and children of the rank and file at the front. My wife and Mr. C. P. Little were responsible for it, and though it involved the most tremendous work in its organisation it was a brilliant triumph and fully justified the labour expended on it.

All the stars of note in the theatrical and operatic world gave their services. The massed bands of the British Army, numbering 600 men, played throughout the afternoon; 100 of the prettiest actresses in London, dressed as hospital nurses, sold programmes; we spent £400 on the getting up of a souvenir for the occasion, and after 10,000 people had paid for admission we were able to hand over to the military authorities £4,600. We provided every one in the audience with a Union Jack, and I shall never forget seeing that vast audience rise to its feet, when the Prince of Wales and his suite entered his box, and sing "God save the Queen" as they waved our national emblem. The Albert Hall looked like the moving wood in "Macbeth"

—in colour. It was at the time that things were going very badly with England in South Africa, and not many of that audience stood with undimmed eyes, lifting up their voices as they did, in their hymn, which was an expression of the deepest affection and loyalty to the Throne, a tribute to their dead over the seas, and a challenge to those ruffians whom we were obliged to call Englishmen who were daily belittling the heroism of men thousands of miles from home, and thereby encouraging Mr. Kruger into a belief that we should ultimately sue for peace and withdraw from the Transvaal.

At the end of the run of "My Daughter-in-Law," Charles Frohman took the entire production and all of us, with the exception of Mr. Bishop and Mr. Tempest, to New York, where we played a most successful season at the old Lyceum Theatre. I remember on our arrival, at the end of the dress rehearsal in New York, Charles Frohman asking me to say to the ladies and gentlemen of the company that, if the play did not draw a penny in America, the pleasure he had had in seeing it that evening was enough to him for any loss he might sustain. And this he truly meant.

He, from those days till now, has been our closest friend—and no two people ever had a better. As a manager he is a prince; gentle, kind and considerate, he does more to encourage and less to hurt the feelings of those who work for him than any one I have ever met in a similar position. No man ever produced plays with so little thought of the financial side of their success as he does. Generous to a fault, and helpful to a degree, had we failed for him instead of succeeding, he would

have been the same Charles Frohman to-day—big-hearted, broad-minded, and without a small idea in his composition—as he was the morning we arranged to take a financial interest in the running of a theatre for the first time in our lives as well as a salary. It was with feelings of delight that we received a wire from him saying that he had concluded an agreement with the Messrs. Gatti, by which we were to be under his joint direction with them at the Vaudeville Theatre for five years. The Gattis were my wife's oldest friends, her father having been linked with them and their Adelphi successes for many a day; and although Mr. Agostino Gatti's lamented death had occurred some two years previously, the firm consisted of that dearest and kindest of old gentlemen, Mr. Stephano Gatti, and his two nephews, John and Rocco Gatti, from whom for five years we received nothing but the most extraordinary kindness.

I had always worked very hard, but with our opening of the Vaudeville ten years ago began labour of the most strenuous kind, from which I have not been free till very lately. My day started at nine o'clock, when I generally worked at any piece I was busy on for two or three hours, and then went down to the theatre. If there was not a *matinée*, I either returned home after lunch to work, or went back to the theatre to interview people and do the hundred-and-one things that are always calling for attention. These finished with, I came back home to bed for a couple of hours, dined at six, went to the theatre at 7.30 to play, and returned home, having supper at 11.45, and going to bed at 1 o'clock. This was my day year in and year

out. We seldom went to supper parties, and, indeed, have never gone out much to entertainments of this kind. They are extremely hard work, and one does not receive a salary for keeping up an intelligent interest in a hostess's unintelligent platitudes, or for straining the larger muscles of one's jaw by turning on a mechanical grin at a neighbour's stories, which more often than not possess whiskers which a safety razor could make no impression on, or, what is worse, are perhaps some vile concoction of one's own, being repeated to you, the fair one at your side saying: "Isn't this good? I heard it at—I forget where—the other evening; but some one said it—I forget who. Isn't it good?" Then follows some original repartee of one's own, that was collected either from *Tit-Bits* or a provincial pantomime. Later, of course, comes the inevitable, "I *did* think you were good in that piece you played in with Mr. Tree"—or some one else that you have never appeared with. And when you correct them, if you have the energy, they invariably say, "Oh! no, of course not." "Hicks? Oh, yes! he was the man who painted the scenery"—referring to the artists of the same name, descendants of that great Transpontine actor, N. T. Hicks, who was in bygone times the melodramatic idol of the old Surrey Theatre. It was he who was a match for twenty men in any play, slaying them as ruthlessly as does Mr. Lewis Waller to-day. "Bravo Hicks," which, I believe, was the name he went by, never made an entrance in a scene without pistols being fired off the stage, and other alarums and excursions happening. As a tribute to his great popularity "over the water," the following lines were written of

him in *Punch* on the occasion of one of the members of the staff of that journal visiting the old Surrey:—

"We paid, we entered, and with a mighty roar
The shout of 'Bravo! Hicks!' came through the open door."

This couplet was sent to me some little while back by that most delightful of old gentlemen and most charming of writers, Mr. Ashby Sterry—known to his London as the Bard of the Thames—and who was waggish enough, on looking at a bright red poster of myself outside the Coliseum, to say it was the only time any one had ever seen me blush, and that after having seen me play Scrooge, he felt that I was a man in vermilion.

In saying that one dislikes going out to parties of all kinds, I mean, of course, those courtesy parties at which, in being bored oneself, one succeeds in boring strangers most successfully, and where one is plied with questions about the theatre by some Miss at your elbow throughout the entire meal. I forget the name of the Royal Academician who took one of this kind of young ladies into dinner after a very hard day's work, and was nearly driven silly by her continual questions as to his opinion of various works of art. But I do remember what he did, maddened by her persistence. He turned round in his chair and, looking at her with a gleam of agony in his eyes, said, in front of every one, "Oh! For heaven's sake go on with your food."

Evenings with one's fellow actors, artists, and all those who are in real sympathy with one's success or failure, cannot be too many. It is only, I think, after the night's work, and when he is in congenial company,

that an actor really lives. It is the strained nights, not work, that cause the *ingénue* to rush to the hare's-foot in the daytime, earlier than she would have to if she were only a society beauty getting sunburnt from habit out of the top drawer, and cause the young actor to go prematurely bald from the dress circle upwards.

Holidays during the last ten years are things which I have hardly ever been able to indulge in, except in a very scrambled way. My recreations have had to be taken in London in the shape of boxing and fencing each afternoon; and when I have left town it has been to fish or shoot, the appointments being generally made a long way ahead. The luxury of living on a golf green, where most of the younger actors of to-day seem to be learning the rudiments of their profession, has up to now been denied me. Doubtless later I shall have time to discover what they appear to know; that all play and no work makes Jack a good actor.

Managing, writing, and acting I find leave very little time for anything but a desire for rest. One is called a hustler, asked how one has time to get through the amount of work, does one ever sleep, and other stupid questions. I can answer the good-natured sneerer. If, instead of rising at eleven, you rise at nine; if, instead of wasting two hours after lunch, you waste half-an-hour; if, instead of being out to golf every afternoon, or playing cards from four till six every day, you either do an hour's work or sleep, you will find that with very little management you have put in five hours more work a day than your rival, with no trouble or hardship to yourself. If you are writing a piece and take as an average that the length of an act is

thirty-eight pages of dialogue, and that you write five pages a day five days a week, working two hours a day, then giving the same time for the constructive work, a month ought to see an act well finished, all this having been done between the hours of nine and eleven in the morning, when your friends, who wonder where you get time to do things, are snoring.

I have always been conscious of the fact that as a rule a man succeeds not through any particular cleverness on his own part, but owing to the remarkable stupidity of the others about him. I remember a well-known horse-dealer first brought this to my notice, when he was teaching me to drive tandem. He said to me once on parting, as a maxim to be remembered, "Mr. 'Icks, always remember this—it ain't a question of how well you drive—it's a question of how badly the other mugs do!" which was sound advice.

And talking of sound advice reminds me of old Bat Mullins, the pugilist, answering a question I put to him in a way that has often stood in good stead me and many a friend to whom I have given it. One morning, while I was putting on my things after a more than heavy knocking about from a youthful Sayers, whom I afterwards discovered to be the runner up for the Amateur Middleweight Championship, I said to old Bat, who was explaining what I had done wrong and what tactics I ought to have adopted, "Bat, tell me, what do you do in a street row, if you knock a man down?" "Well," said Bat, scratching his head, "stand over him—'ave a look at him—and, if he gets up, run like a hare—you've met a good 'un!"

The five years we spent at the Vaudeville were five

years crowded with success. We produced play after play that hit the public taste, presenting only one piece that did not catch on, this being a somewhat old-fashioned French farce that we commenced operations with, of the "in-and-out-of-doors-restaurant-type," that flourished in the late eighties, called "Self and Lady," but with this exception everything was phenomenally successful. The play of "Peril" had been revived at the Garrick Theatre, and the notice for the termination of its not too lengthy run went up on the same evening ours did at the Vaudeville. Some one said we ought both to hold a prayer meeting, concluding with the hymn,

"For those in 'Peril' at the G."

I had now taken over the entire management of the theatre behind the curtain, producing all the plays and dealing with the business of engaging the artists and ordering all the costumes, etc., etc., and scheming out large productions on the tiny stage, having on it sometimes as many as seventy people. I had no leisure whatever to myself. In fact, one day I was asked at lunch if I ever had time to think. Sir Arthur Pinero, who was present, looked up and said, "Good Heavens! I hope not."

For many a day I had longed to see my wife as Alice in "Alice in Wonderland," and as Christmas (1900) was at hand and no play was ready to follow "Self and Lady," the management fell in with my suggestion of producing Walter Slaughter and Savile Clarke's delightful adaptation of Lewis Carroll's immortal work. It proved a big hit. I played the Mad Hatter, and got quite good notices, the Press not grudging me praise as a madman,

though they, wisely no doubt, always withhold it from my impersonations of sanity.

It was the first of the series of children's plays that we did at the Vaudeville, and had we not produced it, probably "Bluebell" and other pieces of that kind would not have been in our *répertoire*. Productions with a large number of children in them are a great delight, but at the same time they are a great anxiety to the producer, "as girls will be boys," and if the official eye is off the youthful actor for any length of time, the penny water squirt or the merry-darning needle—both most useful aids to budding humorists—enter the theatre, find their way on to the stage in an opening chorus, and cause a gentle confusion which may often ruin a performance.

I was always glued to the prompt corner of the Vaudeville every night that we played a musical piece, and I think I may say that it was owing to my presence there and keeping things continually up to concert pitch that the smartness and snap of the performances were largely due; but the work of doing this and playing long parts as well became a very great strain, and one which I could not have continued for a much longer period than the five years I did. No one who has never managed musical comedies personally—and more especially in a tiny theatre where one had no office and only a dressing-room in which one could not have swung a cat—though why any one wants to swing a cat, unless, of course, the cat is on really friendly terms with you and desires that pastime, I cannot understand—can realise what the work means.

The day, and the night especially, are taken up

with one long string of questions fired at you, and budgets of worrying news brought by incompetent underlings who like seeing what effect it will have on a hard-worked man. "Miss So-and-So won't wear this coloured dress." "Miss Somebody Else has not arrived and was seen at Brighton, so is sure not to be here." "And her understudy is ill." "Miss Longsock's petticoats don't match her dancing skirts—what's to be done?" "Miss Somebody Else can't appear in such a scene, because her false hair is missing." "There are fifteen deputies in the orchestra to-night, not one of whom has ever seen the music before." "Mr. So-and-So took the band parts of his number to a charity performance to-day and left them in a cab." "What shall we do?" and so on, and so on. So much was I bothered at times by inconsiderate friends that my servant, the faithful Mr. Belsey, known to half London as Richard, had a placard painted and hung over my dressing-room table with the following line inscribed upon it: "Unless you have good news, please keep it till after the performance," as it became a little trying at times to have to go on and try to amuse large audiences with a vulture at each wing waiting for me to come off and pour into my ear some tale of woe. Oh! dear, how worry plucks on worry in musical work.

You go into a restaurant and see the beautiful ladies known as your *show girls*, wearing their stage shoes and stockings—the latter article of wearing apparel being noticeable only, of course, if they cross their legs somewhat indiscreetly. Then you are informed that all the long kid gloves provided for stage use are enjoying themselves every evening handling *coupe-jacques* and other

dainties in the various supper rooms of smart hotels, so that when they are brought back to the theatre on the following night it is not surprising how tired they look after a careless introduction to a *pêche Melba* or an impromptu christening from a wayward glass of *Crême de Menthe*. As our glove bill very often came to £30 a week, all these things were a great bother to those who had to explain to the accountants the reason for extraordinary expenditure. But the show ladies themselves, if they worked hard off the stage, used to work splendidly for me on it, and in all the ten years I dealt with them I never remember one who was ever anything but perfectly charming, or who failed to work well and hard first night, last night, and every night.

Most theatres have fines for misbehaviour. It is true we had them also, but such money was always returned. I went on the principle of making the girls come to ask for permission to be away if they wanted a night off, and I found it answered a great deal better than having doctors' certificates excusing them, for I discovered they nearly all had some medical friend who felt it his duty to say that Miss Smith was suffering from nervous exhaustion and overwork, and that she must have *a night's complete rest*—this complete rest being generally taken in the stalls of another theatre, after a very good dinner at the Carlton. I also had reason to know that on more occasions than one the youthful guardsman took a medical degree without walking his hospital, all in the interest of the "nervous breakdown," which, by the way, is the only dance I ever saw a show girl do absolutely to perfection.

I remember a young lady who absented herself one evening without permission, and on her arrival at the theatre, I sent for her and asked what she meant by it, and what had been the matter with her. "Oh!" she said, with a face as beautiful and bland as an angel's, "I am very sorry, Mr. Hicks, but I had typhoid fever!" On my telling her she had been seen in a box at the Opera, she as quick as thought said, "Yes, Mr. Hicks, I know—that's where I got it!" Well, on occasions such as this, one could only laugh and ask the lady not to do it again!

One amusing adventure I had with one of my fairest and most delightfully inconsequent friends was when she sent a message to the theatre at about 7.15 to say she was too ill to go on that night. As this was becoming a habit with her, and as the other girls were beginning to think they too could stay off whenever they desired, I determined, as I had time, to jump into a cab myself, drive to her flat, and find out if she really was ill. One of her friends, hearing I had gone, telephoned (I found out afterwards) and told her I was on my way to visit her. I arrived, and inquired of the maid how Miss Jones was? "Oh, very ill indeed, sir," said the maid. "Caught cold at Princes, I think, sir." I inquired if I could see her, and after a few moments I was asked, as poor Dan Leno used to say, "to step this way."

I found myself in lovely Miss Jones's beautiful bedroom—she lying carelessly posed between sheets with lace insertion, looking the picture of misery. Her story was pathetic to a degree, but in the middle of her tale of woe I burst out laughing. When the telephone

message from her friend had arrived, warning her of my journey, she was in the middle of dressing for dinner, so with all haste had taken off her wonderful clothes and jumped into bed so as to catch me out instead of my catching her. In her hurry, however, she had quite forgotten that in her hair, which was most elaborately done, she had a large diamond ornament.

When she asked me what I was laughing at, I answered: "Because I was wondering if you generally go to bed in a tiara?" Not in the least taken aback, she replied: "No, not *so* often, but I always make a point of having my bath in one!" I laughed, and she laughed, and that night a disconsolate swain had to eat a dinner for two by himself, and Miss Jones played at the Vaudeville—giving, if I remember, a performance worthy of a Siddons at her best.

The term Show Girl has always seemed to me to be quite a wrong description of a set of ladies who work extremely hard in a properly conducted theatre, and who are a very great attraction in the lighter forms of entertainment. I use the word because the public knows them by that description; I don't like it, and I know the girls don't. The ladies who were with me were not only beautiful women, but 90 per cent. of them were clever at playing small parts—admirable in picking up extremely difficult stage business, and many of them excellent dancers. They were all very hard-working, and by no means led the butterfly lives which are generally supposed to be inseparable from their form of work, and it is a gratifying thing to any manager to think that out of over thirty of them who married more than ordinarily well, many winning titled husbands

for themselves, and others getting brains as well as position, not one instance is there of their married lives having turned out anything but most happy and successful.

To me, my Gibson Girls, my Bath Buns, my Butterflies and Heatherbelles, were of the greatest possible help, and it is a pleasure in thanking them to feel that they are friends whom I often think of gratefully, and who live in my affectionate remembrance. I hope and think that I was not unpopular with them, although I know at times I was a very hard taskmaster.

During the run of "Alice" I wrote a drama called "Auld Lang Syne" for the Lyceum Theatre. Dear Lily Hanbury played the heroine in the play—one of the most beautiful women the stage has ever known, and one of our dearest friends. No better or sweeter creature ever breathed, and her death, which occurred at so early an age, was, and is, a bitter blow to all who knew and loved her, and especially to me.

The first two acts of "Auld Lang Syne," which I christened "Old Laing's Neck," because that is where I received the blow, were a great success, dealing, as they did, most realistically, with the Boer War. The last two acts, laid in England, failed dismally. On the first night I went round, after playing in "Alice," to the Lyceum, to see what was going on, and found that a rot had set in, and that the piece was failing badly. The curtain fell, and the house booed and booed, and called "Author! Author!" I had stepped on many a time to take an audience's applause, and I therefore, when asked to, immediately stepped in front of the curtain to hear an adverse majority hoot to their

hearts' content—I never heard such a yell—as I appeared.

The theatre seemed full of wild beasts, and I might have been those two notorious murderers, Neil Cream and Chapman, rolled into one, instead of a poor devil who had, after six months' work, written a failure. The din was so tremendous, and my offence so out of perspective with the noise, that I could not help laughing as I heard what seemed to me Hades let loose.

My smile, I think, saved the situation; and the house, which had forgotten it had a sense of humour, remembered, and took pity on the solitary figure of the poor author. When the noise was at its height, I pantomimed to them that I was very sorry, and the audience, appreciating the fact, I suppose, that I took my medicine good-naturedly, laughed at my endeavours to show how penitent I was, and, being accustomed to see me do my best to amuse them in musical comedy, forgave me on the instant, and cheered vigorously, turning what at one moment looked like a mob crying for the head of Charlotte Corday into a Bank Holiday crowd out for a happy day.

I have always made it a practice to hiss myself at the last rehearsal of a play, so as, at any rate, to have the satisfaction of having done it first. If that little band of stupid and heartless people who make a point of coming to boo at so many first nights, and especially at mine, would only realise that I know myself to be a very much poorer actor than they think I am, and that their strange noises convey nothing of novelty to me, they perhaps would stay away from the plays I appear in altogether.

"Auld Lang Syne" was one of those real failures. For myself I cared little. For the artists and the management I was truly sorry. It was such a failure as was a drama called "The Spy," produced in New York many years ago. That piece absolutely fell flat, and on the second night the house was very nearly empty. One of the supposed big situations of the play was where the villain, standing on a bridge—the hero just having escaped from his clutches—offered the assembled mob money for his recapture. "Twenty-five dollars," he shouted, "I'll give twenty-five—fifty dollars for the 'Spy'!" The manager of the theatre happened to be in the prompt corner, and when he heard this bid, being a bit of a sportsman, he stepped on to the stage and said, "Fifty dollars for the 'Spy'? Why, you can have the manuscript and the band parts for the money." It is not related whether the scanty audience saw the humour of the situation as did the country cousins who had bought seats to see the musical play "Kitty Grey" at the Apollo Theatre and walked in by mistake next door to the Lyric, where Forbes Robertson was playing "Hamlet." They sat there a whole act before they realised they were in the wrong house. They probably took Ophelia for Kitty Grey. Who they thought Forbes Robertson was—except that he happens to be the best English-speaking Hamlet in the world—I don't know! I saw him play the Prince of Denmark seven times. I went three times in one week, and paid on all occasions, which I think must be a record in Hamlet seeing.

Was there ever such an understandable Hamlet as Robertson's! Ever one more free from meaningless

theatrical declamation and mechanical effect than this lovely actor's conception of the melancholy Dane. From the moment he stepped on to the stage he held one riveted. One watched—what so few actors are—a prince, and a dignified sorrowing gentleman, not, as is the rule, a performer, trying to embroider stage tradition, and, in his endeavours to elaborate French's book of acting, giving us a Dane from the suburbs of Elsinore, who is only at large owing to the fact that asylums were not at this period a national institution.

CHAPTER XVII

ALTERATIONS AND REPAIRS

It was during the last rehearsal of "Auld Lang Syne" that, after having been without food all day, some one handed me a cup of hot coffee, and a little later, drinking without thought an iced beverage, I contracted a chill that set up an illness which very nearly terminated fatally. I think that is the stereotyped way of saying that one almost died.

I had been acting continuously, playing twelve performances a week, and I suppose I must have been as run down as any man can be, except when his best friends give expression to their opinions of him behind his back: for two nights afterwards, in the middle of the Mad Hatter's dance with his group of animals, I fell down on the stage in such pain that I was unable to rise, and I had to crawl off to the wings as best I could. That night I was taken to my house in a high fever, and the next thing I knew was that I was in a nursing home, there to be operated on for internal trouble which turned out to be a very bad attack of appendicitis with complications.

Have you ever had an operation performed on you? Have you ever, in a weak state, spent a sleepless night, waiting for the dawn and hearing the quarters strike from the neighbouring church clock, and wondering if the next night will find you still in the same

room, but with ears that no longer take count of clocks, or men, or anything? I hope you haven't, and that you never will. I listened to two road men, washing the streets with their hose pipes, singing "Bluebells I gather." I may mention that they were telling untruths about their behaviour to these particular flowers, and I shall be believed when I mention that it was a bitter January morning in the precincts of Cavendish Square; but they seemed happy and full of life, and I would willingly have changed places with them. The thought of their liberty and my captivity grew so on me, that I would have made my way out of what I felt was a condemned cell, if an observant and kindly friend had not taken away my trousers and boots, and so made retreat impossible. I thought morning would never come, and I whiled the time away whenever I could fix my attention on anything but the thoughts of the coming hour of nine by reading the "Christmas Carol." It is about the last thing I would recommend to a patient in a highly nervous condition to console himself with at dead of night, but the dramatic possibilities seemed so apparent that I made up my mind if ever I played again to play Scrooge, and that night I sketched out the sequence of the scenes, and later gave them to my old friend J. C. Buckstone, who made the admirable version I have acted in so many times.

Nine o'clock at last struck. In an instant my bedroom seemed to me suddenly to become like the opening chorus of a hospital musical comedy. Five nurses entered, all very busy with bright canisters in which were sterilised instruments. Some had quantities of towels, another had put a screen at

the end of my bed which enabled me, as most screens do, to see nothing I wanted to, and all that I ought not to have. . . .

I had elected to have the room prepared for the deadly work in my presence, rather than be taken out of it and carried back again. Stretchers are to me only one remove from the last coach ride. When as it seemed to me half London had been busying themselves on my account, I heard the cheery tones of one of my oldest and best friends in the world, Sir Alfred Fripp, on the staircase. The heart failure that any other surgeon's voice would have produced on this wintry morning gave place to a feeling of the most absolute confidence in the presence of this great operator and his personality, which carries with it a feeling to his patient's mind that nothing can go wrong as long as he is about. The hangman had arrived—a gentleman standing with a black cap in his hand, which smelled horribly of a concoction which I learned afterwards was called A. C. E., A. being for alcohol, C. for chloroform, and E. for ether—the first lettered ingredient of the three being the only one I was really on intimate terms with—invited me to mount the operating table. With a heart which by now had sunk into the hot water bottles at my feet, I turned to see my friend Alfred Fripp dressed in mackintoshes. I didn't feel we were going to have much rain, but I suppose *he* thought so, and I did not want to make too many inquiries as to the *why* or wherefore of anything that morning.

As I stepped up on to the table I remember saying, "Ah, well, at last I am forsaking the stage for the

platform." No one smiled, and my last little joke disappeared down the anæsthetist's tube and got a slight giggle from the surgical instruments in a nickel box—at least they rattled, and I made up my mind they appreciated real humour if the humans about me did not. I remember little more.

The very kindly gentleman invited me to put my head in his indiarubber bucket and try to see if I could count more than any one else could with a bag over my nose. Of course I knew that he had some other design on me, and had I worn a watch with my pyjamas my hand would instinctively have gone to protect it. "Take deep breaths," he said, and I did. I even opened my heart to the anæsthetic in my endeavour to give as little bother as possible—*Zuzzz* I heard—and in the street a boy passed singing a classic melody called "When Grandpa put the kittens in his hat." It was a nice last musical remembrance to take away with me from my world, and I was wondering why I had not had the luck to have heard "The Henry the Eighth Dances" instead—when there came a bang, bang, bang—eight, nine, ten—bang! bang!! bang!!! My spirit had fled. Whether it had a night out on its own account during its absence I don't know; it has always been peculiarly silent on the point.

I regained consciousness at four in the afternoon in the arms of the fattest nurse I have ever seen outside the walls of a dime museum, who was whispering in my ear that "it was all right," when I knew much better than she did that it wasn't. I had never come into contact with hospital nurses till this time, and no words of mine can sufficiently express my admiration

for them both individually and as a class. Since getting to know them so well, I have always made it a rule that any nurses in uniform may pass free into any theatre in which I am acting, should they care to do so. Their life is an extremely hard one. They are obliged to show a cheerful face at all times, and to hide their personal troubles so that their patients may be kept bright. They are unfailingly good-tempered to the crotchety old gentleman and the peevish society beauty, and people who see them in the streets, perhaps at 9 or 10 in the morning, little realise that these tired-looking ladies are the night watchers who have been working for twelve hours, and who are going home to sleep all day so as to be ready for the next evening, and that the breath of air they are taking is nearly all they can get from those hours which are given to the rest of the world to live in. Too much respect I do not think can be shown to these women who stand guard at one's bedside and place their backs to the door when the wings of that Angel which men call Death may be heard fluttering in the corridor and asking for admittance.

I happily was up and out and dancing again on the stage five weeks from the day I had heard the road men gathering bluebells, thanks to the care of these kindly ladies, and the skill of a great man who is justly loved by my profession for the innumerable kind actions he has done to the most humble of its members, as well as those who are more fortunately situated.

During my stay in the private hospital I was constantly being introduced to new nurses, who, after the first minute or two's conversation, nearly always said,

"Oh, Mr. Hicks, I saw your operation, and what a beautiful wound Sir Alfred made." This used to embarrass me at first, but I got at last resigned to the fact that most of the female population of London had been present at my carving and gilding, and if I meet anyone now who doesn't make some remark about my anatomy, I feel she had not got sixpence to spare for admittance to my lying-in-state, or that she unfortunately had gone out of town that day.

When the run of "Alice" finished, the next piece we produced was a delightful domestic comedy by Basil Hood, which he called "Sweet and Twenty." It was splendidly cast, and ran right through the year, taking us up to the following Christmas (1901), when we produced a fairy dream play by myself, with music by Walter Slaughter, called "Bluebell in Fairyland." The dresses were designed by the incomparable Wilhelm, to whom we are indebted for the most lovely work in the majority of our productions. This piece, which gave my wife every possible opportunity for displaying her gifts of gentleness, charming comedy and pathos, ran right into the summer, and we played it continually for two performances daily, week in and week out, which was a great strain. In fact, so little of the daylight did we ever see, that we were grateful for a mouthful of fog, and when we left the theatre after the *matinées* we used to stand in the little alley-way where the stage door opens (one of the most uninviting spots in Great Britain), and, with an air of gratitude, take a deep breath of solid London, saying, "Ah! Bexhill-on-Sea!"

I well remember seeing a family party who were

unable to get into the gallery one afternoon, in this alley—a father and mother and four crying children. The youngsters were evidently greatly disappointed, and I laughed a good deal when I heard the woman say to a howling boy in a sailor suit, with the words H.M.S. *Dauntless* on his cap, "'Arry, be quiet—we can't get into this 'ere 'Bluebell,' but we're going to take you to the British Museum—it's much better."

I may mention that as members of the Vaudeville Theatre Company during our engagement there, we had such splendid artists as Marion Terry, James Beveridge, Rosina Filippi, Fanny Brough, Mary Rorke, Herbert Standing, Sydney Fairbrother, Holbrook Blinn, Murray King, Lawrence Caird, Cheesman, Fred Enney, Henrietta Watson, C. M. Lowne, Shelton, Vibart, Vane Tempest, Stanley Brett, Zena Dare, Phyllis Dare, Katie Davis, Maie Ash, Sidney Harcourt, William Lugg, Maudi Darrell, Topsy Sinden, Hayden Coffin, the beautiful Ethel Matthews, Olive Morrell and Elizabeth Firth, George Barrett, Florence Wood, Emily Miller, Coralie Blythe, Margaret Fraser, young Valchera, (who made such a success in "The Catch of the Season"), Florrie Lloyd (who was with us so many years, and made a success of every part she touched), Irene Rooke, J. C. Buckstone, E. W. Royce, Cairns James, the immortal Fielder (that greatest of characters and best tempered of officials), Compton Coutts, and a host of other ladies and gentlemen too numerous to mention. Many of the above played with us after we had left the Vaudeville Theatre; Percy Anderson helped us with his beautiful work in many plays, his most charming dresses being those in "Quality Street,"

I think, and "The Dashing Little Duke," which we produced only recently at the Hicks Theatre.

During the run of "Sweet and Twenty" I produced, with great success, the version of "The Christmas Carol" which I had thought of during my night of terror, and as far as I can see, I shall go on playing it, if I live, till I really am as old as the Scrooge I represent.

CHAPTER XVIII

BY COMMAND

When "Sweet and Twenty" had been running some hundred and fifty nights, a command came from His Majesty the King to my wife to proceed to Sandringham and play her original part in "Papa's Wife" there, and also a desire that I should appear as Scrooge.

His Majesty, who had been in mourning for Queen Victoria for a year, had not been to a theatre during that time, and we had the great honour of giving the first performance before him of his reign. The occasion was Princess Maud's birthday (Nov. 26, 1901), and Dan Leno was also commanded to appear with us. The Vaudeville was, of course, closed for the night, and the whole company left London by special train at twelve noon. The undertaking was a very heavy one in a small way, insomuch as it takes some sixty people to work "Scrooge," which has a very elaborate lime plot for a forty-five-minute play. There is also music throughout and seven visions, besides mechanical effects, so it is about as difficult a thing as is possible to transplant at a few hours' notice.

On arrival at Sandringham the work of the carpenters whom I had sent on to build the stage was well advanced, the new scenery was being fitted together, and everything was well in hand for the rehearsal we were obliged to have, so that every one concerned

could get accustomed to the more limited space at our disposal.

Towards five o'clock I was shouting out to the men to hurry up, and doing my best to do what in the theatrical profession is known as "snowing brown when you can't snow white," when a limelight man let one of his lamps slip and fall from a height, breaking it to bits. As we had only a limited number of these contrivances with us, this was serious, and I'm afraid I lost my temper (after the manner of the great Macready) and called him an ass, with an Anglo-Saxon adjective prefixed.

Things became confused a little, as they always do when men have been working for many hours on end, and I, being over-anxious, was getting more irritable every moment, when a voice at my elbow said, "You seem to be enjoying yourself, Mr. Hicks." I turned round, and it was the King. He had just returned from shooting, and before changing his clothes had come into the big ballroom unobserved to watch the way the scenery was being set up. I apologised profoundly for using language in the royal presence, as I found he had been standing at the back for some twenty minutes prior to his passing any remark. But His Majesty only laughed, and said it did not matter at all, and "that sometimes a little encouragement of that kind kept everything happy."

The King stayed quite a long time, and I explained to him all the various parts of the stage which we were fitting together. He laughed very much at some of our makeshifts; for instance, what amused him most was the fact that the band of thirty we had brought down were

obliged to play in a drawing-room behind the stage, as there was no room for an orchestra in front, and that the only way the conductor could manage to pick up the music cues in the play was by lying on his face in the stage fire-place and giving the orchestra behind him the beat with his foot. This Walter Slaughter did throughout "Scrooge," and, not being a light weight, poor Slaughter on his stomach for an hour with his face in the fender, looking anxiously at me for cues, was a comic sight.

I had had the honour of meeting His Majesty on many occasions, and not one of his most humble subjects could have been more charmingly natural and easy to those who worked for him than was this great personage. I don't know why, but somehow at Sandringham everything seemed more ordinary—if one may use the expression—than usual. The affection that was given to the country gentleman here seemed to eliminate all the pomp of a Court, and the King in a tweed suit, with rather muddy boots, standing among a group of stage hands, and talking about our work in our way, seemed very wonderful to me. I don't mean to say I expected His Majesty to speak blank verse, but to hear your King saying, "I hope you have got all you want," and "Have all these men been properly looked after, and had enough to eat?" and little remarks of that kind, makes you feel it was fine to be an Englishman and sing, "God save such a man."

The curtain rose at 10 o'clock on our performance to an audience of some three hundred people, their Majesties' guests being of the household, the tenants, and certain of the neighbouring gentry. "Neighbouring

gentry" reads like something out of "Verdant Green," but I don't know how else to express myself. I've tried "some friendly neighbours of the King," but it didn't look right, somehow. Everything went off extremely well. I presented each member of the audience with a copy of a special edition of the "Christmas Carol," kindly given me by Mr. W. L. Courtney. I felt this would set all doubts at rest as to whether I had ever read my Dickens before essaying one of his chief characters—actors' conceptions so often are at variance with those of the author through an ignorance of the writer's work.

My wife's share in the entertainment seemed to please the royal party immensely, and Dan Leno convulsed everyone with his "Tower of London," "Hunting," and "She Sleeps in the Valley" songs. The King and the Princess Maud, to whom the whole entertainment was a surprise, it having been kept a profound secret from her, laughed unrestrainedly at that comic genius.

I watched the audience through a hole in the back cloth and I never saw anyone laugh more than did the King when Leno was describing the Tower and repeating "Standing with one's back to the refreshment room" or when telling his hunting experiences, and how he came off and "got a liqueur of Ditch."

As the Royal party left the room they stopped and talked to all of us, and Leno's appearance made it difficult for those near him to keep straight faces. At the last moment he found that his servant had forgotten to pack a collar, dress tie and dress trousers. In despair he came to me and asked me to lend him something to put on. The collar and tie were easy enough to

procure although they were miles too big, but the nearest I could get to dress trousers were a pair belonging to a blue serge suit I was wearing. These I gave him and he hastily jumped into them, buttoning the front button-hole on to one of the back buttons and turning them up about four inches at the bottoms. The collar being very big gave him the appearance of a mechanical figure such as ventriloquists use—his neck looking so small in it that one felt his head must be movable and could turn right round and stay there if he wanted it to. I think I saw a twinkle in His Majesty's and the Prince of Wales's eyes as they were complimenting him on his performance.

Supper was served in the Conservatory, and we were waited on by twelve tall servants in scarlet liveries. During the meal my wife and I were sent for, and His Majesty, after graciously telling us how pleased he was, said, "Would you accept these little souvenirs of to-night?" Would we? The words sounded strange. My wife's souvenir was a pearl, ruby and emerald brooch, and mine was a pair of cuff links with the Crown and E. R. in diamonds on them, which I need hardly say are the most valued things we possess.

As we left the King, he told me to send Mr. Leno to him from the supper room, which I did. Leno returned with a handsome scarf pin in his hand. Opening the door and looking round in comic dejection, he said: "Well, boys, I've got my notice." All the footmen laughed as much as we did. It was a quick and funny thought to put His Majesty in the position of a theatrical manager who was getting rid of unnecessary artists.

We left Sandringham at three in the morning by a

motor car and slept at King's Lynn, returning to London early in the morning to play a *matinée* performance at the Vaudeville. On the journey up, Dan Leno, without effort of any kind, told us the story of his early life. There was much to laugh at, but the stories of his mother's and father's hardships, related by him as they were with no attempt at creating an effect, made one sad beyond words. I remember his telling us how as a lad he, in company with his uncle, that capital good fellow and excellent comedian Johnny Danvers, who by the way was about his own age, used, if very lucky, to sleep on the floor of an ill-furnished garret and be thankful. The two little lads, left alone at night after having danced themselves tired in the bar parlour of a public-house for hours at a time for a handful of coppers, amused themselves by lying awake and telling each other stories, the rule being that if one of them made a hit with the other by his effort, he always got up, rolled up the window blind as if it was an act drop, took a call to an imaginary audience on the tiles and bowed his acknowledgments to the roof, which in after years Leno was so often to raise by his wonderful work. Leno was killed by his friends. He paid the penalty of genius by becoming an all-day show. His arrival anywhere was the signal for the entire room to migrate to his corner, wind him up, listen to him with delight, and then kill him with kindness. His busy brain worked and worked all-day as well as all night, and the tiny willing frame not able at last to support the labour that an extraordinary intellect imposed on it, burnt itself out, and the world lost a thousand peals of laughter.

He had two cows which he kept in an orchard, he told us. One he called Rum and the other Milk. Why many people should have so little consideration for the man who works all night and very often in the afternoon also to earn his living, and expect him to be always up to concert pitch and carry his bag of tricks with him wherever he goes, is a mystery to me. But it is so with the actor. I wonder how the stockbroker would like to have to recite all the street prices after he had left the city each day for the gratification of his friends, or the engineer to work out various cubes, or explain for some hours after his day's work was done the breaking point of certain cables under varying conditions. They would resent it; but it is the same thing exactly. No better rebuke to this sort of inconsiderate person could have been made than that which a well-known actor made to the late Sir Blundell Maple. It was at an At Home, and the good baronet catching sight of the man he liked to pay 10*s.* 6*d.* to see at night, called out, "Ah! my dear friend, how are you?" "Very well," replied the actor. "I'm glad," said Maple, "to see you here. You can come along and tell me all about your theatre." "Certainly," came the answer, "and then you can tell me all about certain articles of china in Tottenham Court Road."

Another excellent reply made, by whom I forget, to the well-known hatter, Mr. Heath, years ago, is worth recording. "Ah!" he said to an actor of his acquaintance at some social gathering, "Here you are, are you? What time are you going to recite something for us." "I don't know," said the actor, "What time are you going to try on your hats?"

The dead-head, too, is a capital example of barefaced effrontery. A wholesale provision dealer, writing to my late father-in-law, received an admirable reply. The purveyor of tinned meats said—"Dear Mr. Terriss, could you let me have a box or four stalls to see "The Harbour Lights?" Thanking you in anticipation, I am yours, etc., etc., etc., J. ARMITAGE."

William Terriss answered—"Dear Mr. Armitage, with all the pleasure in the world, and would you let me have two dozen eggs, a side of bacon, and a dozen pots of jam for home use. Thanking you but without the slightest anticipation, I am yours, etc., etc., etc., WILLIAM TERRISS."

The written retort courteous was never better set down than by Ellen Terry in replying to the poet Calmour. Alfred Calmour and she had had some slight tiff, I believe during the rehearsals of "The Amber Heart," which the former wrote for the Lyceum; and the author having occasion to write to the lady of infinite charm began his letter—"Dear Miss Terry, the 'dear' is purely *conventional*." He only had to wait two posts to receive a reply which began, "Dear Mr. Calmour, the 'dear' is purely *theatrical*." I suppose I ought to mention for the benefit of the uninitiated that "dear" is an expression which is always used in my profession before the first long hour after the introduction is over. A thing I heard that amused me the other day was Henry Arthur Jones's reply to one of our most successful modern actors, who said, "Jones, I am thinking of playing Hamlet." "Are you?" said Jones. "I should keep on thinking about it if I were you."

This was not to William Gillette, who has long

promised us his reading of the Dane. I should like to see him play him. I suppose we should have the inevitable cigar through this new reading, though smoking of course would turn the play scene into a small music hall performance, which I'm not sure would be a disadvantage. Gillette is a charming and delightful man, and once asked us both to go and spend a holiday on his steam sea-going houseboat yacht, about which he was careful to explain that although she had all the comforts of home, her speed did not warrant him racing her, except against herself.

He tells a very funny story of being hailed by a seafaring man who was leaning over a bridge, under which the good ship *Pretty Polly*, as the celebrated actor had christened his boat, was slowly steaming. Gillette had left New York about a fortnight and had arrived by gentle stages at a point which would have taken a fast boat about two days, and the seafaring wag, noticing the speed of the comfortable craft beneath him, sang out, "Hi! Mister, when did you leave New York?" "On the third of the month," replied Gillette. "Really?" shouted the sailor again, "What year?"

William Gillette is always full of good stories, and an anecdote I remember of his was the story of one of the members of his company, who becoming engaged to be married, began singing the charms of his future partner. "What is she like to look at?" asked the manager. "Oh!" said the falling benedict, "she's fair, with beautiful blue eyes, and a face that's covered with freckles." "Ah!" said Gillette, thinking to be of use to his friend. "I can tell you how to get rid of

those." "Get rid of them be blowed!" came the unexpected rejoinder, "they are her chief attraction."

It was he who told me the story of the two Jews who met, and in discussing their various speculations, which had not been too successful, were eulogising the advantages of insuring their warehouses against fire. "You should insure, Ikey," said one, "you should insure your houses." "I have insured mine last week against burning." "Have you," said the other—after a pause, "*Then why don't you? ! ! !*" which for a world of meaning in a few words wants a lot of beating.

Why is it that Jew stories always seem to amuse everyone, and as a rule no one more than the Jews themselves? A story that was told me not so long ago by a Hebrew friend of mine amused me considerably, and seems worth relating. Two of his co-religionists, father and son, went into a West End jeweller's and asked to see the best goods the shop possessed, as they were anxious to make a handsome present to a lady. The shopkeeper eagerly produced what he had to sell, pendants, rings, head-pieces, and all kinds of trinkets, but nothing seemed to please the elder customer. After about an hour and a half of bringing everything he had in stock for their inspection, the shopkeeper got irritated and said, "Come along, out you get—go on, get out of my shop, you couple of dirty Jews, you're no good to me—get out or I'll throw you out." The two Hebrews left hurriedly, and when they were outside the son turned to the father and said, "Dit you hear what he called us, father? Dirty Jews!! Dit you hear what he said—*Dirty Jews!!*" "I did, my son," said the injured parent. "Father! God will punish him

for those words, won't he?" "Yes, my son. Yes, God will punish him—in fact, He has punished him already. I've got two of his rings in my waistcoat pocket."

I find I have told quite a number of Jewish stories in these pages. I hope this will not be construed into any feeling of disrespect on my part for a community for which I have the very greatest regard and amongst whom I number some of my very best friends, but most of the good things I have heard are generally labelled as from them, and the humour seems to go when they are placed in another *locale*.

I have organised or assisted at many, many *matinées* for Jewish charities, as I always feel that in doing so I am making some slight return to a vast number of ladies and gentlemen who are one of the chief supports of the theatre in this country. I have never had a bad turn done me by a Jew; I have had a thousand good ones. I wish I could say the same for many Christians who have often harmonised for my benefit that old comic song entitled "My word is not my bond."

When "Bluebell's" splendid run came to an end, in which my wife had set London singing "The Honeysuckle and the Bee," the theatre was re-decorated and we produced "Quality Street." Mr. Barrie, having been delighted with my wife in the previous fairy play gave her, in Phœbe Throssell, one of the most beautiful parts imaginable. Miss Marion Terry played her sister, Susan Throssell, divinely, and the two of them seated side by side in their out-of-the-world home working their samplers and sitting in their lavender scented garden, to which came the faint echoes of the Napoleonic Wars, were a delight to watch.

In the present Viscount Esher I have had for many years, through storm, shipwreck and battle, a very true and staunch friend, and one to whom my wife and myself cannot be sufficiently grateful for innumerable kindnesses. There are no more inveterate theatre-goers than Lord Esher and the sweet lady who bears his name, or sounder critics than they are, seeing, as they have, everything that is to be seen in the art of all countries. I owe much to their advice and helpful suggestions, and I am proud to say I think we are held in their hearts with something of the affection that they live in ours. It was owing mainly to Lord Esher that his late Majesty commanded "Quality Street" to Windsor on the occasion of the visit of the King and Queen of Portugal to England (Nov. 21, 1902). It was the first State performance of King Edward's reign and was one of the most brilliant gatherings possible to imagine. It was unlike the Sandringham performance, inasmuch as it was all pomp and circumstance.

Miss Terry, my wife and myself had the honour of being sent for by their Majesties the King and Queen, who expressed themselves charmed with Mr. Barrie's delightful work. The King chaffingly told my wife she ought not to cover her pretty hair with a cap such as she wore in the play; and the Queen told me, laughingly, that she did not like me in whiskers and I must go and shave them off at once, which Royal command of course obeyed at once; and after having supped at the Castle we all returned to London, very proud of the honour that had been done us and thankful for the kindnesses of which we had been the recipients. Her Majesty the Queen during the afternoon had graciously

sent for my wife and spent an hour with her watching all the children engaged in the production have their tea and play in one of the big drawing-rooms, near the Waterloo Chamber. Her Majesty put the mites at their ease in a very short space of time, and while my wife was telling little anecdotes of each one and answering the many simple and kindly questions that the Queen put to her concerning them, they amused themselves, quite unconscious of the fact that they were in the presence of anyone but a sweet and gentle lady, and were being watched by the Queen of the greatest Empire the world knows. Her Majesty, on dismissing my wife, made her a present of her birthday cake, requesting her to have it cut up for the little ones in the play. It was a charming act on the Queen's part, and its cutting was the occasion of great rejoicings at the Vaudeville on the following afternoon.

It was at Windsor that I first met my very dear friend Mr. Guy Laking, the Keeper of the King's Armoury, known to his intimates as the "King's Ironmonger." No greater authority on armour lives to-day than does this brilliant young man, and I am indebted to him for his wonderful and perfect work on the weapons, heraldry and armour for my production of "Richard III."

Talking of my Richard III., I met Claude Carton, who said to me, "Seymour, I hear you are going to play Richard." I said, "Yes." "Ah, well," said the witty author, "you'll be saved some trouble in the make-up. You won't have to wear a hump." "Why not?" I inquired. "Oh, the audience will have that," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

MIXED BISCUITS

"QUALITY STREET" was one of the most delightful plays imaginable. I had a very difficult part in it, Valentine Brown, the one-armed doctor. The loss of this member, I believe, handicaps even a billiard player, let alone a light comedian. This Barrie success ran some eighteen months, and at its conclusion I produced a play by myself and Ivan Caryll, called "The Cherry Girl" (December, 1903) which, although not so successful as "Bluebell," on whose lines it was moulded, did extremely well.

The same week we produced "The Cherry Girl" Caryll and I did our other new play next door at the Adelphi. We called it "The Earl and the Girl." I was a very great success, running over a year at the Strand house, and then being transferred to the Lyric.

"The Earl and the Girl" was a prophetic title, for it was in this piece that the nobility and gentry began to look upon me as a universal provider of beautiful women for their town and country houses—the journey being made, whether by land or sea, always *viâ* St. George's Hanover Square.

During the run of "The Cherry Girl," I was casting about in my mind for an idea to write its successor on, when one evening Captain Robert Marshall—who, brilliant fellow that he was, has, alas! been taken all

too soon from his many friends and an admiring public —asked me why I did not write a modern version of "Cinderella" for my wife. He told me he had thought of doing so, but that musical work was not in his way, and that he could not manage the interpolation of songs and dances into a comedy.

The idea struck me as one peculiarly suited to providing a really fine part for my better star, and I set to work with Cosmo Hamilton and wrote "The Catch of the Season," which turned out phenomenally successful. It ran six hundred nights, and introduced the famous "Gibson Girls" to the grateful youth of the day. The music was by a then unknown musician called Edgar Haines, who has since done more than ordinarily well, and has many years before him to walk arm-in-arm with success.

The spring came, and with it news to our home that made us all, especially my dear Ella, supremely happy. In February, with God's blessing, the place of the little lad whose loss we had so long silently mourned might be filled.

The question as to who should play the leading part in the new piece, now, of course, became a matter for most serious thought. It was a splendid acting opportunity, and in addition to being practically the whole play, had numerous songs and dances, designed especially for my wife, which did not look easily adaptable to anyone else. At the time we were debating which was the best move to make—whether to postpone the production or try and find a substitute—I was producing a musical play called "Sergeant Brue" at the old Strand Theatre, and in it I had put a little girl who had been with me

before—Zena Dare. She was remarkably intelligent, worked hard, and had a beautiful face, and on my recommendation she was given the task of playing this exceptionally big part opposite me in our new production.

As luck would have it, the newcomer made a great success. She had stuck to her work at rehearsals like a Briton, and her performance was a charming one, which not only helped us out of our extremely difficult position, but spelt her name in golden letters of success which she has made brighter each year by the wholeheartedness and sincerity of all she undertakes.

Her sister, Phyllis, was with us in "Bluebell in Fairyland," and played one of the children in the garret scene very sweetly. But she had rather a childish affectation of speech and would insist on saying "Oh! *Liss*-ten to the Bells!" with a jumping inflection on each word. In vain I tried to correct her; she would either smile good-naturedly or stare blankly at me, and on reaching home this Dejazet of eleven was often heard to say, "Dear, dear! that Mr. Hicks has been rather trying to-day."

After the first hundred nights my friend Miss Zena left me, having a previous contract to fulfil, but returned very shortly and has acted continuously with me for nearly eight years. When she left I had to find another substitute, and my eye fell on a chorus child with a beautiful face, very much of my wife's type. Her name was Maie Ash. She was taken in hand, and played the part perfectly charmingly for a very long time. She is now my sister-in-law, having married my young brother Stanley Brett, who suffers so much, poor

fellow! from his horrible likeness to me. We are always being taken for one another, and he has often played my parts as my understudy without the audience making any comment other than either, "Isn't Hicks in good form to-day?" or "Never liked Hicks till now."

B. C. Stephenson, the author, who saw my good lady (as the servants say) and myself playing together, wrote round a note to her, saying "It is all splendid—we loved 'Mrs.'—we wouldn't have 'Mister' (her) at any price!"

After many years of work, a very large number of people know one by name or by sight, this having occurred not so much from being illustrious as notorious, let us say. And it was amusing to find an old lady at the Royal York Hotel, Brighton, who, though a constant theatre-goer, had never heard of me and, quite rightly, didn't want to. The proprietor of that famous establishment, which looks more like the grand stand at a motor race meeting every Sunday—so many are the cars surrounding it, whose occupants arrive to sip the honey that the hive contains—is one Harry Preston, a fine all-round sportsman, one time amateur champion light-weight boxer of England. He is, I should think, the best liked hotel manager in the country, and has built up his business on his personal popularity. He is the Louis Quatorze of London-by-the-Sea, his welcome to all and sundry being "Good morning, sir. You are looking perfectly splendid," in a subdued tone, much as a butler whispers in your ear, "Port or claret, sir?" or a lover asks the maiden he adores "How much money have you got?"

This bold assertion that everyone looks "perfectly splendid" has grown to such a habit that he said it, it

is recorded, to an old gentleman who arrived in the care of two hospital nurses, having given up automobiles for his own *locomotor ataxi*, and some two months later when the old man was leaving the hotel in a wooden overcoat for the last garden party, Harry Preston, with tears streaming down his genial face, raised his hand as usual, and said, "You are looking perfectly ——" The boots nudged him, and he altered the well-known line to "awful" this morning.

It was he who presented me to the theatre-going old lady before mentioned, who, happy soul! had never seen me. She, however, knew my brother well, and, I understood, liked him. My friend of the five-ounce gloves said :—

"Madam, may I introduce you to Mr. Seymour Hicks?"

The old lady said "How do you do?" without even looking up.

"But," said Mr. Preston, "*Mr. Seymour Hicks*," with great emphasis on all three words.

"Oh, how do you do?" indifferently murmured the old lady.

"*But*," said Louis Quatorze, now thoroughly alarmed, feeling that I must be hurt at this great indifference, "*This is Mr. Seymour Hicks*, brother of Mr. Stanley Brett."

In a moment the whole attitude of the old lady changed.

"What!" she said; "a brother of Mr. Stanley Brett, *the actor!* How *do* you do. I am proud to meet you."

The Cockney who went into a country lodging, and seeing a pot of honey upon the table said to the

landlady, "I see you keep a bee here," is well known, but there is another of its kind that I do not think is such public property. A young Londoner, who had never left the metropolis in his life, arrived at Brighton and saw the sea for the first time. He asked a boatman on the front what they did in the town mostly for a living. "Oh!" said the fisherman, thinking he was having his leg pulled, pointing to the sea, "We sell sea water at a penny a can." The Cockney traveller went away and had his lunch in the green fields inland, and when he returned to the beach towards evening the tide was out. He looked in wonderment, and turning to his friend the boatman said, "My eye! you have done a trade to-day!"

It was at the Royal Hotel that I stumbled up against that Leech of the nineties, the wonderful Phil May. We had been talking for an hour or so when I said suddenly to him:—

"Of course you wouldn't recollect it, but I met you before once, many years ago."

He said quietly, "About fifteen, wasn't it?"

I couldn't believe that he remembered, and I said "Where?"

"In that fried fish shop near the Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel, at the time you were acting there," he answered.

I said, like Datas, "Quite right, sir," and was amazed at his memory, considering the casual life he led, being so retentive.

It was quite true. Our meeting took place when I was connected with the old Olympic in the very early days, in a very second-rate fried fish shop where we both

happened to be supping, not either of us having enough money to go to even the fried fish shop *de luxe*. I saw, sitting in a corner, a very shabbily dressed man—in fact, he was down at heel, and the bottom of his trousers frayed, and one might have passed on, had not the strange cleverness of his eyes peeping out from his fringe, which even in those days was cut with the precision of a well-kept privet hedge, arrested attention, I sat down and was introduced by a mutual acquaintance—"This is Mr. Phil May."

He asked me if I was starting an actor's life, and when I told him I was he said he hoped I should do better than he was doing. He was, he told me, *trying to earn a living* as a black-and-white artist!

Why this meeting should have remained in that brilliant genius's mind all those years I don't know. I don't flatter myself I looked anything out of the ordinary; but it did, and he mentioned that his luck changed very shortly after our meeting—for he laughingly told me how, feeling that an address was everything, he took the lease of a very smart unfurnished flat in Bond Street, so as to have it to send his work out from. It was absolutely without a stick of furniture, and he, in company with three or four other artists as penniless as himself, used to sleep on the floor and work in the carpetless, unfurnished rooms, but was repaid by finding that his valuation of human nature was correct; "Bond Street" was the open sesame to the publisher's sanctum. What snobs we all are!

It was Phil May who told me the story of the jarvey who drove him round Dublin on his first visit to that city, and in showing him the sights stopped in front of

the Bank of Ireland, and said, "That, sorr, is the recipticle of the money that the English take from us!" On its roof are six decorative figures, and May inquired of his jarvey what they represented.

"Begorra, sorr, they are the twilve apostles!"

"But," said May, "there are only six."

"Sure, I know that," said the jarvey; "the other wans are lunching with the Lord Liftinant."

Writing of Phil May one thinks of *Punch* and its genial and famous editor of other days, Sir Francis Burnand. In corresponding with him once my typewriter mis-spelt his name, using the letter "e' instead of "u," writing it "Bernand."

This nettled the good knight somewhat—why, I don't know—so he tore my letter across and re-directed his envelope to me as "Seamore Hocks Esq."

I wrote and apologised for the young lady's error, saying I was sorry he was offended, and he replied, "Not offended—off-handed." I suppose it was one of his bad mornings, for as a rule he is the kindest and best-tempered of men. His tongue is as ready as a moneylendêr's advance on good security, and it is seldom he is scored off; but on one occasion, when he was discussing the many anonymous contributors who sent things to his paper, he said "It's extraordinary the number of really funny things I get sent to me for *Punch*. "Really!" said a friend. "Why don't you put some of them in?"

About 1900 I had had the honour of being elected to the Garrick Club, a more delightful place than which does not exist, and here I came in contact with many well-known and charming people, whom I am proud to

say I number among my best friends. It was through becoming a member of the Garrick that I got to know Beerbohm Tree intimately for the first time. It has been my great pleasure to know him now for years and years, and I have a very sincere regard for him and his many lovable qualities. Quantities of people who do not know him think that his abstracted manner and far-away look in private life is assumed for the purpose of creating an impression, and that his absent-minded actions are well-thought-out mental impromptus. This is quite a mistake. Like nearly all really fine artists, he is as simple and gentle as it is possible to be. He is a sympathetic friend, with a heart that is big enough to find a corner for the troubles or disasters even of a man he may only just have become acquainted with. He is a boy in his love of fun and good-natured joking, and has the most wonderful sense of humour possible. His courage is magnificent, and we have no one in our profession to-day who is such a gallant sportsman in adverse times, or one who meets trouble with such a cheery smile, charming back the Goddess Fortune to his side when she poutingly looks like being unfaithful to him, and taking a week-end trip to Paris with a rival manager.

No actor, save Charles Wyndham, can turn a sentence or make a speech better than he, and the recognition his work has received might well have come along long ago, seeing that he has been carrying dear old William Shakespeare about on his shoulders unaided for years, giving continual productions of the classic drama, and marching in boldly where the eighteenpenny comedy producers fear to tread.

His one fault, born of his generosity and kindly nature, is that he is not insistent enough on seeing a policy carried through to a definite conclusion. He conceives a line of campaign on a certain subject, which is admirable, but no sooner is it started than his heart is swayed by the long tales of those whose interests are adversely affected. He is the one man doing the big thing to-day on the stage, and it is to him our majority ought to look, and follow. It is he who, when he raises his fist on high to compel the so-called managers of country theatres to come into line, should let it fall like a sledge-hammer on their heads; but alas! an echo from Slocum-on-the-Slosh of a bad year's takings leaves his mailed four fingers and thumb suspended in mid-air and tied there for ever by a kindly thought.

When a body of managers, of which he should *not* be the president, pass resolutions to curtail the number of performers and the length of performances in music-halls, he ought either to stop their stupidity, or withdraw from figuring as the head of movements to which it is common knowledge he is opposed, and which make him a target for the ordinary theatre-goer's laughter and for the poor actor's black looks, who perhaps doesn't know that Beerbohm Tree is the last man personally to hamper him in earning a living, and the first to put his hand in his pocket and give on all occasions. It is not Sir Herbert Tree who deserves the angry protest from the poor actor when he looks at his children's empty plates.

One thing that seems to have escaped the theatrical managers in their desire to interfere with what the

public want to see at the music hall is, that if they will only give the music halls long enough plays they will hang themselves as successfully as did the man with the proverbial rope. The essence of their being is "variety," and long pieces with indifferent acting will drive their patrons elsewhere, just as it has alienated the public from the majority of dramatic theatres. It is not music halls, length of performances, the number of players employed, or anything of the kind that keeps people away from a large quantity of the houses which present serious fare. It is because the plays, as a rule, have of late been extremely poor, the acting mediocre in the extreme, and the prices high. A music hall is a half-crown hope, a theatre is a ten-and-sixpence certainty; in the former you pay the smaller amount for a comfortable seat and smoke your cigar, hoping that though you dislike one turn you may be pleased with another. In the theatre you find, perhaps, during the first act, that the very theme of the play is not to your liking, but you are condemned to sit there from eight till eleven, being fed on asparagus when your soul yearns for artichokes—and that without your cigar and without ten shillings and sixpence, which I should say was worse if tobacco nowadays was not so good.

These things, and many others, Mr. Tree ought to deal with firmly, and not allow his better judgment to be hampered by his kindly thought for those who manufacture grievances to cover their own incompetency for providing the public with what they want to pay to see.

The theatrical manager makes two mistakes. He caters for a very limited class of people and then grumbles when they come.

I have never had the pleasure of acting with him, but my wife has. She relates an amusing story of a rehearsal of the "First Night," when the old actor, Achille Talma Dufard, so beautifully played by him, leads his daughter into the orchestra. Stepping over the footlights, Tree slipped and fell, dragging my wife with him among the instruments and music-stands! Luckily neither was hurt, but being an actor-manager's theatre, the entire staff rushed to pick up Mr. Tree and help him on to the stage, forgetting my wife altogether! The rehearsal proceeded, when the kindly lessee of His Majesty's said, "Good heavens! where is Miss Terris?" Search was made, and she was found in the big drum, looking like a comic swan upon a well-made nest!

It was at the performance of this play that one of the actors was upstairs in the dressing-room when he should have been on the stage with my wife and Mr. Tree. To add to the unpleasantness of a long stage wait, one of the wings painted to represent a dwelling became unfastened and fell on the stage. With great presence of mind my wife, whose Gaiety training stood her in good stead, turned to Mr. Tree and said, "Ah, father! as usual you are bringing down the house!"—which kept the audience in a good humour and gave the missing actor time to arrive.

Some time ago, among a lot of old autograph letters I came across one written by the late David James to his then acting manager, Mr. Smaile. It was a long letter from abroad, discussing the casting of a new play he was about to produce. It concludes in this way:—

"And now, my dear Smaile, please understand me.

I will give Tree £15 a week—not a penny more. H. B. Conway can have £25, as I think he will draw it, but £15 is every shilling as much as Tree is, or ever will be, worth, and I shan't go beyond that, so please do not write me again on the subject."

David James's judgment was very much at fault for once. But it was David Garrick who sent Mrs. Siddons back to the provinces as "of no value"—so our old David made his mistake in the excellent company of the drama's Goliath.

CHAPTER XX

NATIONAL AND PERSONAL

In speaking of the lessee of His Majesty's, the National Theatre scheme presents itself to one's mind, seeing that he has done all that has been done for the drama since the death of Henry Irving.

The National Theatre ! ! ! I wonder if there are really half a dozen people whose names we see in print in connection with it insane enough to think either that it is wanted or will ever come into existence. Even the donor of the £70,000 is humorist enough to keep anonymous, so that when the white elephant is driven off into the jungle of oblivion, it won't crash through the undergrowth with his name on a placard for the monkeys to laugh at.

The National Theatre ! ! ! Apart from the fact of the gross unfairness of State aid against private enterprise, what would happen to Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's own ventures which are one half Shakespearean revivals, a class of entertainment which would of necessity be the mainstay of this National House. Have any of the promoters asked each other where the actors are coming from ? Why, we haven't enough first-class actors to cast plays properly at six London theatres. Where do they think they are going to obtain enough good actors ? It is the worst form of damning to be called a good actor, I know, but that's all this committee could expect. That class of artist who never

makes a success because he never makes a failure—where do they think they're coming from? And, having come, who do they think will want to see them? If they could offer all those who are finest in the theatrical world in their various lines of business a certainty and a pension, then they wouldn't come; and so to watch Mr. Excellent Mediocre wandering about with William Shakespeare—a duller old gentleman than whom when badly presented never bored a man to extinction—would be a thing that might bring the committee under an indictment for "Inciting to riot."

Of course we all know that the whole thing is only a national sea serpent and that many of those who preach this nonsense are only doing so because they feel it dignified to be associated with a national anything, though this national blue light of the marshes is each season spoken kindly of by the press in *Pink Paragraphs for Pale Promoters.* Anything national means something surely of moment to the nation: that is to say, the supplying of the nation's want. But have the nation ever asked for a theatre of their own? Indeed, have the nation ever asked for any theatre anywhere?

No. They have asked for value for the money they have paid for their seats, and, if they haven't had it, have quite rightly grumbled. The British public do not care two straws for the drama. It sounds splendid to say they do, and it is excellent to meet in committee and convince a dozen people, who all think as you do or they wouldn't be there, that "The time has now arrived when our national poets shall be the people's own—when our children shall be educated and have

the pages of the great dead opened for them, and their drab world shall be clothed in verse so that the language of cabmen shall be of flowers, and a vacant chair shall be set at each meal in every cottage for Chaucer and the early English poets"; it all sounds splendid, but the early English writers make most of us feel after we have read them as though we have been hit on the head with a coke hammer covered with a damp towel. What fun! What fun, as the gryphon says to the mock turtle.

Let anyone offer the true-born English man, woman or child, when he, she, or it is able to paddle about in life's sea of trouble, the choice whether they would like to go and listen to the poets or to see the "Private Secretary," laugh at "Charley's Aunt," or stare at "King Lear," and I can tell them at once that the proposed National Mausoleum would require several new extra heating apparatus installed. Nobody wants a national theatre. We have national budgets, national taxes, national schools, national horrors of every kind—spare us a national theatre and let the anonymous donor keep his money or lend it to some of us needy theatrical managers at 5 per cent. taking a lien on our Shakespearean repertory as his security, and he will just as easily say good-bye to it for ever as if he gave it to the Empire, or for that matter the Alhambra or any other place of variety.

It may seem ungracious to have spoken of the dearth of really good actors, but I doubt if there are many who will contradict me. Leaving out of the question our acknowledged old successful leaders, Gerald du Maurier —who in my humble opinion is one of the finest actors

on the stage—and say another dozen in his flight, where do we get to? We find ourselves fallen from the Dome of St. Paul's to the top of a tenement house. Where are the rising Henry Nevilles, the Charles Warners, the youthful Leonard Boynes? There are no such people. One and one only in this school have we got, and that is Lyn Harding, who must be the hope of England's team when we do battle against foreign competitors; one of his recent performances is as elaborate in its detail as terrifying in its power.

There is a coming John Hare in young O. B. Clarence, and a splendid character actor of this school in Spencer Trevor. There are also first-class actors in their various lines such as Edmund Gwenne, Dennis Eadie, and Cyril Keightley, and there may be some others, but their names surely have to be thought hard for before they are written down. In my own line of business, one is ashamed to think how very poor are my own qualifications, and those of nearly all my contemporaries in it, remembering as one must the past light comedians whose names are household words, such as Fred Leslie and the like. Of rising actresses there seem to be hardly any—who is there approaching Miss Gertie Millar, whose art is a perfect delight to watch? It is true that in another form of work suddenly Miss Marie Löhr has jumped into the front rank of *ingénues*, and that the daughter of that fine actor Fred Terry has made an instantaneous hit and abiding position. But cast around and see how very little rising talent there is anywhere. Till the coming of Lily Elsie, how long was Daly's Theatre without a youthful successor to Marie Tempest; but now that she

has come it is doubly pleasing to be able to hold out both hands to welcome her, for, added to a lovely voice and beautiful face, she has technique that was acquired by years of hard work in the provinces, her success having been won by her own individual and splendid endeavour.

What is the reason of it all, I wonder? Lack of talent? or lack of rough work at an early age—that good bold work which brings out all that is natural in acting before it has time to be stunted by too much education; for there is no question that all the greatest actors who have ever lived have been lucky enough to escape a public school or 'Varsity training, where "good form" is the chief study, and the overstudy of good form means to an actor the cultivation of self-consciousness in the highest possible degree.

I do not say, of course, that there are not a lot of mushroom *ingénues* who are all Sarah Bernhardts for ten minutes by the clock, or that there are not youthful Salvinis who act magnificently in the pages of *The Sketch* and *Tatler*, but the fact that this class of success exists only goes to accentuate the lack of real talent. There is no longer a ladder in the theatrical profession; society, good looks, the heroine of a *cause célèbre* or someone who has done something at something else, takes the lift. It is all a great pity, and reminds me of the American who saw Windsor Castle for the first time. "Yes," he said, "it is a bully place, but it is a great pity they have built it so near the railway."

"The Catch of the Season" had been running for some two hundred and fifty nights, when at nine o'clock on the 16th of January, 1905, I had the greatest

pleasure that can be given to any man—that of seeing his wife supremely happy, holding a tiny replica of herself in her arms. This mite, who from the hour of her birth has had every thought we possess centred in her, was christened Betty, and I need hardly say is not only the most beautiful and wonderful little girl that ever lived, but also rules our household with a rod of delightful iron. She was indeed, and has ever been, our catch of the season, making the dull days full of sunshine and the worrying ones full of happiness.

The comedy was in full swing when my wife came back to the theatre to play the part originally written for her, to which she brought her charm, her grace and her experience, making our poor creation of a modern Cinderella her very own and the piece doubly valuable in the public eye, and adding a vitality to the performance that helped it to run six hundred nights. Edward Royce, who had now joined our forces as stage manager, did the most excellent work in this production as he did in the several years that he worked with me afterwards.

Our original five years' contract with the Messrs. Gatti and Frohman was now fast drawing to a close, and, thinking it would be a wise thing to have a theatre of our own, I, in partnership with my old friend Sidney Marler, built the Aldwych Theatre. Prior to its completion, when we had bidden the Vaudeville an affectionate farewell, we took on the road in the "Catch of the Season" the biggest Musical Comedy Company that had, up to that time, ever left London. Our expenses were about £800 a week, travelling as we did 105 people, and we broke the record, without

exception, of every theatre we played in, our biggest week's receipts being £2,500 at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, while at Manchester, Liverpool, and many other towns we played to gross takings varying between £2,200 and £2,300 in the eight performances.

This was all very gratifying; our first fourteen weeks' tour in the provinces was a sort of triumphal march through England. The number of lovely ladies with us played sad havoc with what are termed "the lads" of the various villages we visited, who followed us from one place to another, beauties' smiles emptying garrison towns of their officers and cities of their Bloods. Among us we had sixteen motor-cars, which enabled us to make most of our journeys by road instead of rail.

Anything kinder than the treatment we received from the provincial audiences can scarcely be imagined, people we had never heard of holding out the hand of friendship and inviting us to shoot and fish and stay with them, and we made new friends that have remained to this day, although they have seen me act many times since.

At Christmas we returned to London to open the beautiful new Aldwych Theatre, which was now ready, and where we elected to start operations under Mr. Charles Frohman's banner with a very elaborate revival of "Bluebell in Fairyland."

The Aldwych is one of the finest theatres in London, its only fault being an overlarge dress circle. I secured the land, saw it cleared, watched the excavations to the blue clay and saw brick set on brick and the girders swung by the mighty Scotchman on to their iron resting places. I chose all the decorations—

electric fittings, seats and curtains, collected old prints and playbills which I hung through the circular corridors, chose carpets to cover polished woods, and, having arranged for the most elaborate stage for its size in the metropolis, Mr. Sprague, the architect, handed us over one of his very best houses.

I remember, just before the last ladders and scaffoldings were cleared from the front, climbing to the very top of the theatre and writing the name of Ellaline Terriss in indelible ink on the five Bathstone cornice stones round the front of the ornamental work. I did this for luck, and it brought it to us, for we played to enormous business at the Aldwych for the three years we were there, starting with "Bluebell" at £3,000 a week with the *matinées*, and our two next productions "The Beauty of Bath" and the "Gay Gordons" playing steadily week in and week out to over £2,000 a week.

It was during the run of the latter piece that their Majesties the King and Queen of Spain visited the theatre and honoured my wife and myself by sending for us to the royal box. They were exceedingly kind and gracious to us, as was Her Royal Highness Princess Henry of Battenberg. During the conversation the King asked me where Miss Camille Clifford was acting. I said that she had left the stage some two years ago. "Nonsense," said the King, "I saw her with you in the 'Beauty of Bath.'" "No, sir," I replied, "she was not here at that time." But nothing I could say would persuade His Majesty that he had not seen her acting with us after "The Catch of the Season." So I tactfully agreed that I was in error, and

that the royal memory was not at fault. It was not till long afterwards that I realised that he had mistaken Miss Sydney Fairbrother's imitation of Miss Clifford in a comic sketch for the lady herself, which was not to be wondered at.

It was a great change, this big theatre from the dear little Vaudeville, but the provincial theatres had broken the ice for the difference in size. Here I had beautiful offices, and upstairs near my dressing-rooms I built a supper-room with kitchens attached, in which I had often the privilege and pleasure of entertaining many celebrated and interesting personalities.

The room was a very big one, curious in shape and decorated in oak and green. Everything on its walls and in its bookcases contained relics of the stage of earlier years. I bought at Christie's a very large quantity of things belonging to Henry Irving when his effects fell under the hammer, and although I possess nothing perhaps of any great intrinsic value, everything in that room had a thousand tongues for me and told me many a story; and I often used to smoke a cigar after a long rehearsal, tired to death and grateful for the peace that this room gave me.

Here were Edmund Kean's butcher boots, worn as Richard standing side by side with Henry Irving's "Ingomar" footwear and John Philip Kemble's boots, also worn as Richard. What thoughts peopled one's mind as one gazed at these relics with the fitful firelight dancing about them and painting pictures of the men who had once stood in them!

In Kemble, one thinks of the declamatory school, with its partisans who hated and belittled Kean. In

Kean one saw the gipsy, who, by his genius and natural acting, revolutionised the method in vogue of presenting Shakespearean characters in measured, though no doubt beautiful, periods, which produced an effect quite opposed to all that was natural. We see his bitter quarrel with Macready, his zenith and his fall; his deplorable mistake in becoming enamoured of a friend's wife, and that friend an alderman! I never think of this part of Kean's career that I don't picture him as having no sense of humour whatever, and sitting on a baron of beef flirting with a turtle dressed in a City livery! No doubt there are very beautiful aldermen's wives, but I always feel that Kean's indiscretions ought to have been shared by a wonderful creature like Nell Gwynne, or a woman of the type of Lady Hamilton!

I have a letter of this mighty little man's and it is worth printing, for it shows the violent nature that could even terrify his comrades at rehearsal when he declaimed a passage with all the fire he possessed. It is dated 1816, from the Old Boar's Head Tavern, and is written of Macready, who was his rival at the time, and whose star was mounting the heavens when Kean's, through ill-health and drink, was as some meteor that was fast burning itself out and illumining only in flashes the world whose night it had so long made day. It reads:—

"DEAR SIR,—What you say about me is an infernal lie, and I will prove it to-night by thrusting the words down the lying throat of that hound Macready.

"Yours in pain,

"EDMUND KEAN."

It is a vivid little thumb-nail sketch of an undisciplined temperament.

All that Kean did, and all that happened to him, even in his decadence, is wrapt in the mantle of romance, and it is for this reason, I suppose, that in reading of the well-ordered, comfortable life of Garrick, I can never bring myself to believe that Kean was not the greater of the two in instinct, if not in technique. For great genius and great respectability seldom borrow money to spend with each other.

By the way, I have often wondered if the great actors of the past really did cause audiences to have hysterics and swoon away by the exercise of their tremendous power, or whether it was that the audiences drank more port in those days than they do now. *Je pense!*

On the wall near Kean's boots is the ivory-hilted sword he used as Brutus, with his name scratched on the bright brass blade, and near by are the armlets worn by his son Charles, as Sardanapalus, given me by Sir Squire Bancroft—the Charles in whose arms he practically died when playing Othello, and to whom, with the greatest pathos, he said as he turned from the audience he was to leave for ever: "Speak to them, Charles; I cannot."

Here on all sides have I personal property of the great actor who flourished a hundred years later—Henry Irving. In this case is the crimson rosette that was pinned on his coat every night he played the Burgomaster in "The Bells"; in that case is the Waterloo medal with the very pin he used to attach it to his shirt by; here are the foils he used the first night he played Hamlet at the Lyceum with the Batemans;

next it, his Macbeth dagger; higher, his suits of chain mail worn in the same tragedy; his Coriolanus armour and weapons; set by them under glass is the dress sword worn in private life by David Garrick and the walking-stick that great actor used continuously, and which became, at his death, the property of the Mayor of Hampton. It was given me by my friend W. L. Lestocq. Near by are the long scissors Henry Irving used to cut out all his Press notices with, a favourite pastime of his, especially in the provinces. Many an epigram on critics must those scissors have heard!

Near them is the book he used in Becket—indeed, it was the last property the great actor ever held in his hand; above it the letter he used in "The Vicar of Wakefield," and the last property Ellen Terry ever handed to him before they parted; here, the cast of his wonderful hand by Onslow Ford; and, on a platform guarded by a silken cord, the chair that he breathed his last on, that night at Bradford, when a hush fell over England at the news of the death of one of her giants.

I hung the first programme his name ever appeared on as an actor at Sunderland next that announcing his farewell performance at Bradford. In the space between the frames, imagination can see a life of struggle and ultimate triumph, the distance being laurel-spread in the later years. Those two programmes are wonderful mementoes, the first crying out "I am," the second "I was."

Charles Wyndham's shoe-buckles and knee-clips that he wore regularly in the part of David Garrick are here, and with them a pair of his pince-nez which

I took from him one night at supper, also the pince-nez Henry Irving used to make up with at his last performance at the Lyceum, and the plate of the private door that he put his key into for seventeen years at that historic house. Near to this is the last pen William Terriss wrote with just before his death, and the Victoria Cross that he used to protect nightly in "One of the Best," to the frantic applause of a mighty Adelphi audience. Next these treasures is the stick Toole used in "The Spitalfields Weaver"; there a rare print of Rachel, and close to it a document ordering candles for the auditorium of Drury Lane Theatre and signed by Wilkes, Booth, and Colley Cibber himself, the two former being ancestors of the actor Wilkes Booth, who shot President Lincoln in the theatre at Washington.

In writing Cibber's name one is reminded of the wittiest thing he ever said, adding excellence by the quickness of the repartee. He had been invited to supper with the Dukes of Buckingham and Rochester, with whom he was on intimate terms. He was kept late at the theatre and arrived half-an-hour late for the appointment, for which he apologised. Rochester begged him not to concern himself, saying: "We have been occupying the time very pleasantly discussing you." Cibber said he was highly honoured, and inquired the nature of the conversation. "Well, Colley," said Buckingham, "we have been wondering whether you would be hanged or die a lingering death." "Ah," said Cibber, quick as thought, "that depends on whether I adopt your lordships' principles or your mistresses'."

Here is Ellen Terry's coral necklace that she wore as

Olivia the first night she ever played the part and ever afterwards; here is Adelaide Neilson's dagger that hung at her waist in "Twelfth Night," in a case close by the last property that genius Fred Leslie ever held in his hand (the will of Don Carlos Salluste), speaking of Gladstone as William Ewart Sorrypebble; the pipe J. M. Barrie smoked as he wrote "Quality Street" is near by; and a glove of Kate Vaughan's, two yards long, is on the mantelpiece; the knife Tree used as Shylock, which he kindly gave me, has an honoured place; the ducat given by Sir James Linton to Henry Irving and used by him in the same part, with the 14th century clasp of Shylock's bag; John Philip Kemble's Star of the Garter; a decoration worn by Mounet Sully; the cloak worn by Irving as Benedick, and his Richard III. first act dress; a snuff-box that Sothern carried on in "Garrick"; a chatelaine worn by that master John Hare as Sir Peter Teazle; my wife's shoes that she wore as Cinderella, and Lady Bancroft's tiny pair she wore as Peg Woffington; and a hundred mementoes of this kind which filled my room with ghosts, to all of whom I have often reverently lifted my hat, and felt how humble I am and should be in the presence of these men and women whose boots I am not fit to brush.

One case I have omitted to mention is a shallow one containing the fur cap worn by the unrivalled Coquelin for forty years in the part of Gringoire. Coquelin was always extremely kind to me. My admiration for him was unbounded, and in the later years of his life, I am happy to say, I met him a good deal.

The last time I saw him act was in "Cyrano," at

Liverpool, when he ran up there to play a flying *matinée*. He did not seem very well then and appeared to be losing his vitality, but his powerful, pug-like face with the little twinkling eyes, and those lips which added music to Edmond Rostand's song, were there just as of old. When I first was introduced to him, some six years ago, I had no idea that he knew that such a nonentity in art as myself existed; but he had seen me play in nearly everything I had done, and in discussing "The Catch of the Season" and Scrooge together, he said, "I cannot describe you—you are a *pousse café*. You are a kind of your own—when Hicks is dead it is all finished."

I have often heard it said that he was very vain. I never saw the slightest trace of it; on the contrary, he was the most simple man imaginable. One night he discussed with me the lack of vigorous acting on the English stage and the general prevalence of reserved force.

"Sometimes," said Coquelin, "I go and witness a scene of great emotions calling for a passionate appeal or a furious denunciation; but the English actors are growing to act too little with their hearts and too much with their heads, so that I leave the theatre as if I had been present at the telling of some family secret which I should not have overheard."

His views on the staging of Shakespeare in England, when he dealt with the supernatural effects they called for, were highly interesting. For instance, he told me he could not understand why we English always insisted on the materialising of the Ghost in Hamlet, which he held to be ludicrous and lacking in imagination. The

Ghost, he urged, should be a ray of light, or a voice, no more; and he complained greatly of the overmuch gesture used by most English actors when they are in the Ghost's presence. Coquelin explained to me that as the greatest fear is expressed by inaction of the body, a fixed gesture of the hand, and a terror of the eye, this method should be more universally adopted in so awe-inspiring a scene. The French actor illustrated to me his idea of real terror, and indeed his eyes painted a picture for me, while a hand outstretched (not too far from his body) seemed to push off the invisible. He was a great man. The story is told of him that one night, as Irving's guest at the old Beefsteak room at the Lyceum, he was explaining how next season he intended playing a round of his host's most famous parts—Richard, Benedick, Dubosque, etc., etc. He waxed enthusiastic, and Irving said nothing till he had finished, when he picked up a fork, and gently tapping Coquelin's stomach (which was very fat) slyly whispered, "Would you?"

My first meeting with the foremost of French actors, M. Guitry, was an amusing one. I had, of course, often seen him play, but generally in make-ups. One night at the Aldwych, Mr. Grünebaum, the well-known cigar merchant, a friend of his and mine (a man who supplies widowers with more weeds than does any dressmaker for the gentler sex), came to my dressing-room in company with a tall, charming man who only spoke French, and whose name I did not catch. My French is extremely poor, but I gathered he was paying me compliments. I took him down on to the stage, and let him listen to the band rehearsing two new songs.

I explained the mechanism of the theatre; showed him the turn-up seats; how the electric light resistances worked on the electrician's table; how the curtain was rung up and down, etc. When he left I discovered, to my horror, that it was Guitry. I had only been showing the A B C of the theatre to a master of his art who had forgotten more than I knew. I walked about kicking myself for days, and since then have always made a point of paying particular attention to names on an introduction.

He mentioned to me, I remember, that he was travelling for rest and recreation, and I told him the story of the great clown Grimaldi, who, going in a state of great depression to a specialist in Wimpole Street, was told that there was nothing really the matter with him at all—what he wanted was rousing up. "Go to the theatre, my dear, good sir," said the doctor. "Go and have a good laugh, that's all you want. Go and see Grimaldi." "I am Grimaldi," said the clown, dejectedly. Guitry had not heard the story before, he said—or perhaps, meant he had never heard it in such bad French.

Such is life! An American humorist described it once as meeting a man, having a drink, and saying good-bye; but I am more inclined to agree with another who said it was "one infernal thing happening after another," which was much what the cow must have thought that Edward Terry kept as poor law relief when he was churchwarden at Barnes. This willing English rival of Nestlé's Swiss milk was located in a field near the adjacent churchyard, and all the poor who came to the kindly actor in distress were given a jug—so the

story goes—and an order rang out, in the finest "Dick Phenyl" jerks, to "Go along and milk the cow." The scarcity of grass at Barnes, and the continual drain on Nature's resources, became such a worry to the part of a herd condemned to low alone, that one morning it was found to have strayed through the hedge into God's acre. It was standing on a grave eating a wreath of immortelles and had nibbled its way well into the middle of the "Sacred to the memory of ——" before it was led back to await another batch of customers.

This tale may be much what Mark Twain wrote in answer to the false report of his death—greatly exaggerated—but it is funny enough to set down as fact; just as is, I think, the story of the old actor and the young actor who were told to go on in a front scene and hold five minutes' impromptu conversation, so as to give the stage-manager time to set a big set that was not ready. The young actor became panic-stricken, and protested it was impossible, but the old actor reassured him, saying: "Nonsense, laddie; I'll stand by you. I'll do everything; don't be frightened! Bank on me."

Reassured, and depending on the elder man's experience to talk sense enough for the audience not to discover the author was receiving five minutes of marginal notes, the timid youth followed his old-time comrade on the stage, nearly to fall down in a fit when he heard the onus of the whole of the dialogue to be invented put upon his shoulders. The wily old man waited till the young man was well in the middle of the stage, and then turning his back on the audience he exclaimed, sympathetically—

"And so, fair youth, you say your sister was ruined

by a Spanish count. Come, tell me the whole sad story of her undoing!"

History doesn't relate if the audience ever heard of this illicit amour; but I should think the young man's reticence was due not so much to the fact that decency forbade him as to a parched tongue, a pain in his middle, and knees that clicked together like a pair of castanets.

I knew an old actor of the above type who, falling on evil times, became content to lead the supers and play small bits, or "responsibles," as this line of business is known. During the year he joined a goose club, so as to be able to be sure of having a bird with sage and apple sauce, and a bottle of whisky when the festive season for these things came round. The night that he went to receive his prizes he became somewhat elated with the conviviality around him, and started for home with unsteady steps, carrying the goose under one arm and the bottle of spirits under the other. Arriving at Hungerford Bridge he was asked for the then usual halfpenny toll. In searching for it in his waistcoat pocket with his left hand, the bottle slipped from under his left arm and was smashed to atoms. This let his passion loose, and not being in a condition to reason with himself and make the least possible of the misfortune, he began to grumble incoherently across the bridge, cursing the toll, the bridge, and the whisky itself. By the time he had reached the middle of the footpath he had worked himself into such a rage at his loss that he said, "Whisky . . . bottle whisky . . . broken, gone . . . whisky . . . gone . . . for ever . . . whisky toll . . . bridge . . . whisky . . . gone

. . . Oh! Damn the goose too!" and proceeded to fling the unoffending bird over the parapet into the greedy Thames. He arrived home late. His wife saw him empty-handed.

"Where is the whisky?" she inquired.

"Smashed!" said the inebriated old gentleman. "Smashed . . . toll halfpenny . . . broke on bridge . . . all soaked into the ground . . . couldn't mop it up."

"But where's the goose?" asked his anxious spouse.

"Oh! the goose . . . oh! the goose! . . . Ah! that depends on the tide. It may be at Greenwich, it may be at Maidenhead. . . ."

CHAPTER XXI

WHY SHOULDN'T I . . .?

BEFORE sending these pages to the printers' devil, who, no doubt, feels I too am related to the Covent Garden fruiterer who sold Adam a bad apple, I cannot help alluding to the quantity of letters which I receive from the blossoms and the buds of England, asking for advice as to the best way to go about adopting the stage as a profession. To all and everyone I have generally said with Lear, "Think again, Cordelia." It is only the business of the dramatic agent and the dramatic art school to throw open a pair of octopus-like tentacles and squeeze the aspirant's pockets, without much thought of the qualifications of the individual marked A. F. in Schedule D. B. of their books. The letters of inquiry I open begin, "How can I," etc. My reply is, "Why do you," etc. I wonder who it was made the stage the refuge of artistic sinners. The liberal professions are only called so because they are so generous in handing the stage their failures. But who was the optimistic prophet who preached to the halting, the weary, and the tame the gospel of the Temple of Thespis, saying: "Oh, thou who art all unfitted for anything thou hast set or art about to set thy hands to, hie thee to an enclosed space which is called the Theatre, and there sitting, behold the exercising of a profession the easiness of which has never before been seen.

"Flinging your drachmas boldly to him of the curved beak who, proud of his face and ashamed of his legs, sits from sunrise till the twilight selling tickets to the unwary;—go study these players for one long week, and then see with what ease they earn princely incomes. Watch the dancer; see, 'tis but the wagging of a foot—have you not a foot? Is it so difficult to wag? See the maiden with a rustling skirt—have you not skirts, can you not rustle? Listen to the singer of the song of fun—have you not voices, cannot you buy lyrical mirth as well as he you see?

"Take up your household gods, then, and leave your difficult professions for this easy one—buy hair for the head and unguents for the face; change your togas every time you fling yourself before the public gaze, and then will come the riches of Crœsus, the society of princes, and the plaudits of the eager and appreciative mob."

Who, in Heaven's name, was this owl?

"What are the chances of gaining distinction or a livelihood on the stage?" I am often asked.

I can only hope in answering this question to do so in the very simplest manner possible, avoiding academic discussion, or propounding theories which I have no doubt far cleverer people than myself could easily brush aside. I suppose that of all the arts there is not one of which the public knows so little and of which there are so many erroneous ideas. Why this should be it is difficult to understand, for an audience at the theatre has perhaps greater opportunities than any other class of students to examine this particular art continuously and watch the best of its exponents actually at work. But so the fact remains, that, as a rule, although a layman

may have been an ardent playgoer for fifty years or more, once he steps through the iron door leading from the stalls to the prompter's box, he will probably be found to know as little of the real side of the actor's life, his worries, his struggles, and the conditions under which he plays, as a child who has been taken to the pantomime for the first time. To the laymen, therefore, the iron door is the key to a China-town where the habits, customs, and mode of daily life are different from those of any other calling. The rules which govern the theatre never have been and never can be set down. For, generally, cases that arise in this community are dealt with by the individuals themselves, who can only hope, not for the advice of their fellows, but at best the armed neutrality of their friends, even if they are lucky enough to escape the fierceness of a fight from which few emerge unhurt, to bear tidings of victory to the town.

How many I wonder would commit so heroic—I was almost going to write desperate—an act as to peep behind the green baize curtains, and, peeping, step among the scenery, and, stepping there, want to remain if they knew that for the twelve actors who stand around them there were twelve times twelve hungering at the stage door eager through necessity to underbid each other, and in taking less salary to attempt harder work; in fact, to do anything to take the place of any one of the twelve just mentioned—so great is the competition. Is it because of the ignorance of the conditions that surround the theatre, I wonder, or the fact that everything looks so happy when the lights are up and the band is playing, that so many an occupant of the

auditorium, from the velvet stalls to the dear old gallery, thinks it so easy to become, and succeed as, an actor? Ignorance and vanity, I suppose (for we are all vain in degrees), and the fact of there being no standard with which to compare the gems which we think we are bringing to a profession is that which makes it more difficult to convince the eager aspirants for dramatic honours of their lack of capability.

The draughtsman can hold his copy next the original, and his own eyes tell him what his friends may not have done; the amateur author writes, and a business firm will refuse publication, a hard criticism which is perhaps the kindest there could be if the leaving of steady employment is contemplated; a woman may sing, and find she cannot reach the note she would—that informs her of her shortcoming; but the budding actor or actress create their own comparison, naturally not unfavourably to themselves; and who can say "You lack this or that" with any degree of definiteness? There is no Plimsoll mark in our art to say "Yes" or "No" by. The weights and measures of fitness, even were they made, have not yet the Conservatoire built in which to keep them. The thought that comes to the stalls or to any section of the audience of "Oh, I could do it as well as that," while a performance is being watched, has only to have the mother's or the friend's echo, "Yes, my darling, I believe you could," and the weed that destroys is sown.

And the next stage in this sad, eventful history is the Amateur Dramatic Club (which for professional purposes is about as useless as anything could possibly well be), and then the wild career is started and the young

Thespian walks in unarmed, to do battle in perhaps the most desperate fight that rages in any of the professions, not excluding the oft and most quoted case of the Bar.

The whole subject is so comprehensive that it would be indeed difficult to deal with it in anything like a thorough manner in so short a space, and all I can do is to try and tell you, whether you be the would-be artist or his parent, some of the difficulties to be encountered. You find yourself suddenly on the floor of a sort of artistic stone-house at Omdurman, where a man who falls seldom gets up. If only one person is saved from entering the most appalling of professions for those who are its failures, any trouble this poor effort has put me to is repaid many times over. The aspirants for theatrical honours, be they young or old, and, unfortunately, they are of all ages, from the hopeful *ingénue* of forty-three to the passionate beginner of fifty-five, seldom, if ever, ask themselves, "Why should I be an actor?" but generally, "Why should I not be one?" And here comes the first puzzler, for it is as difficult to say why he should not as it was for Lord Kelvin, at the end of a learned discourse on electricity, to answer the question of the child of five, who lisped gently, "What is electricity?"

The aspirants will say as they read this, "Is the stage the only profession which is appalling for its failures? Are not all professions equally so for the failures that are necessarily in them?" And here one can answer more readily, and almost without hesitation, "No!" for the morass to which that will-o'-the-wisp, the footlights, leads on its victims is one, perhaps,

which has no equal. It is that Bourne End from which no traveller ever returns, even on a Monday. Men may throw aside the sword for the barrister's wig, a literary career for that of a mining expert, the position of a younger son at home for the Church militant abroad; but once let a man hear a round of applause for an individual effort (generally undeserved, by the way), let him have stood for one short hour, dressed as some great soldier in a drama, under the glaring sun of an open lime, and nothing will ever make him give up the calling which he thinks has been his since the hour of his birth, nothing will make him fit for another and totally different profession.

The whole atmosphere of the stage is artificial, the question is one purely of temperament; and so, once the eager amateur has put his hand to the till, he becomes, like the fraudulent cashier, unable to let go of it. There are no regular business hours during the day. Rehearsals are a movable feast, especially under the banner of an actor manager, and as there are no auditors of an actor's time, and accuracy as to quality and quantity are only needed in the absolute business of acting, the general conditions are those of every man his own master. The pleasant companionship of one's fellows, even during the hard work necessary for the presentation of a play, is so happy and congenial, as a rule, lightened as the burden is by a jest here or a kindness there, and the society of the many brilliant people who either write or work for the stage, makes the return of the business man to the city, after having once tasted the charm of work away from the drudgery of daily routine, obviously a thing not to be expected.

I do not intend in writing to say nothing but "Don't, don't, don't," but before any young man or woman makes up his or her mind to "rush in where artists fear to tread," I want them to think why they wish to be an actor?

The majority of the letters I have received (as everyone does, doubtless, whose name is at all familiar to the public), with the object of getting advice as to adopting the stage as a profession, have come from clerks in good permanent work, soldiers who are sick of soldiering, girls who are one of a large family and must do something, and the "Pittite" I love, who has earned distinction at the local amateur club of which he is a member. One soldier's reason for becoming an actor is generally the same as his ten other friends who wish to forsake the army for the stage. It generally runs as follows: "You see, I have just come back from India; I cannot afford to live at home in a line regiment; and my father can't afford to give me an allowance, I am determined to throw it over and become an actor—rather jolly don't you think so? I know I am all right, because our Colonel's wife, who knew Wilson Barrett rather well ten years ago, told me I was topping, and mind you she's a judge! We did the 'Mikado' at Poona, and a lot of fellows who were there said it was ever so much better than the Savoy—in fact I did more than Gilbert intended." And so on and on and on, saying nothing to urge his proficiency for his new task, only probably showing his deficiency for his old one. Given that the young lady mentioned who wishes to act does not do so from inordinate vanity, which alas! is only too often the case, her

reason is a praiseworthy one, if nothing else, outside the artistic merits of the case. There are five at home; one is a governess, one is a typewriter, one paints, one does nothing, so she must do something. She is a pretty creature, gentle of manner and soft of voice. She dances very nicely with straight feet, her little imitation of some popular star is ladylike in the extreme, and while she smilingly sings last year's coon success with a Panama hat, trimmed with lilies of the valley, she asks you, "Shall I do any more?" Is it possible to say "No, my dear, you, with your gentle manners and promise of little, are totally unfitted for the struggles and disappointments you are so anxious to rush into." One has not the heart to, so something kind is murmured, and the next thing you hear of her is that she is walking on at a guinea a week at some fashionable theatre, and has been promised an understudy. And so she, like so many others, starts off towards a phantom Klondike totally unequipped, and when the hard lesson is learned, totally unfitted for any other occupation.

One may ask then, what are the attributes of the actor? How can anyone know whether to adopt the stage as a profession or not? I suppose there is no calling that asks so many perfections. Personal appearance, which, next to that magic called "magnetism," is the first thing to look for, a fine voice, grace of manner, a sense of humour (oh, look for that in every corner of your being), a strong constitution, a capacity for grappling with every difficulty, a courage to face the bitterest disappointments, and a knowledge of men and women off the stage, for till success is

reached, and very often then, an actor's life unfortunately is, and must be, a clever all day show. These are the attributes, and at once I hear the eager aspirant for Thespian honours say, "Is Mr. So-and-so such a fine fellow to look at, that Bassano's English types of Beauty fade into insignificance? Voice! Good heavens! Has the great Mr. Smith got a voice? Sense of humour! Would the successful Mr. What's-his-name display himself as a Roman Lictor if he possessed a particle of it? Grace of manner! Has the great Mr. Jones got it?" and so on. No! I do not say any of them have any of these things in a superlative degree, far from it perhaps, but then they are successful because they have the one great quality which can dispense with every attribute—"magnetism." Be possessed of that only, and you can almost afford to forget all the rest. Be without it, and you may earn a living so long as your youth and good looks are with you. Sixty minutes of cleverness without magnetism leaves you pleased but unmoved; fifty minutes of magnetism will bring in its wake ten with something extraordinary. You have not noticed the length of the fifty, you have praised the hour thankfully for its ten. No successful artist has ever been without it, and I doubt if it is possible to fail to have a knowledge of its presence in watching a beginner, even though his efforts are crude, and, as they must of necessity be without experience, naturally faulty. And so it must be apparent very easily, even to the lay mind, that to find a reason for advising an individual not to go upon the stage is well-nigh impossible, for where by ocular demonstration you can prove to him, her, or it that they are lacking

in all the natural requirements before mentioned, they at the end of your uninterested harangue can turn and, agreeing with you in everything you have said, reply: "You are quite right, but I have magnetism."

And who is to convince them they have not that magic which is a thing, not of substance and of no tangible shape or form. It only remains therefore, before trying to help the budding Thespian on his way, to point out, not the reasons for his giving up what he cherishes, but a few of the circumstances which really surround a calling of which he, as an ordinary playgoer, can have no possible idea. Do not think I am unkind; indeed, there are so many interested people, agents, promoters of theatrical syndicates, and a hundred others, ready to tell you, if you have the money to invest, of all the charms of the stage as a profession, that one is almost tempted to err on the side of painting the difficulties in darker colours than one need, to counterbalance the other side of the picture. The enthusiast's general impression of the stage is Fairy-land as a rule; beautiful music, lovely ladies, magnificent clothes, the adulation of the multitude, the praise of an always enthusiastic and encouraging Press, and his fellow-workers helping him at every turn. A day which is his own, a night in which his vanity is tickled by the applause of an admiring public, London all the working year, his holiday on the Riviera, and peace at last in Westminster Abbey, where a yearly pilgrimage is made by a remembering majority, who, dropping their blossoms with their noisy tear, file sorrowfully away, and with bated breath whisper one to the other, "When shall we see his like again?" "What!" cries the

enthusiast, "in life can compare with this?" Always *en évidence*, and a memory perpetuated. Indeed for all who like this sort of thing, would that it were so.

The whole subject—how to go on it, and why to keep off it—is so very large that in re-reading what I have written I feel I am hardly answering the off-repeated question as to whether there is a possibility of distinction or even a livelihood on it as a profession. Charles Dickens' answer about there being "plenty of room at the top" of course holds in everything. On the stage there is plenty of room—hotels full of it—but the gap between distinction and mediocrity, and a living, are so wide and so deep that they will accommodate legions who fall, and greedily "cry for more." The question of luck I think can be ruled aside without a thought in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. A man or woman has just to make the opportunity and then take it, and the hundreds of unsuccessful actors and actresses who have not succeeded have done so because, alas! they should never have hoped for success. It may seem hard to write so, but I do this to beg the lady or gentleman who is anxious to act not to think it an easy profession simply because through its lack of competitive examination it is open to all comers. Given, too, that a man or woman be clever, it is not possible as an actor or actress to do what a painter or singer can do in the sister arts. Paper and ink in a garret is all that is needed by the clever musician, canvas and oils by the artist, and their work is on view to the highest bidder. But the actor is unable to exercise his art or show his fitness without the elaborate and expensive

accessories of the theatre, which run into thousands of pounds; and so, even though he has the power, he must wait and wait, and perhaps then never get the opportunity of showing what is in him unless he have the business capability after waiting, as I say, for Heaven knows how long, to find a frame for his portrayal of the human passions. And let it never be forgotten that waiting and starving are very frequently brother and sister.

Briefly this is the gloomy side of a fascinating life where, if success be attained, the pleasure is, I venture to think, equalled by few other delights in this world.

Personally I have only to be profoundly grateful to the public for allowing me to entertain them. My talents are by no means out of the ordinary, and as to why I have been treated so kindly in my work I do not seek to ask, lest it might send droves of young people into what I would try to keep them from.

But let us look now on the brighter side of the theatre when the opportunity has been made and has been taken, and success is at the helm and all going well: where the young lady and gentleman have under sound advice, and after grave consideration, become actors and are succeeding. And they will succeed if they have talent; nothing in the world can hold them back, the art of acting being such a rare gift that there are always a hundred managers with telescopes on the theatrical horizon scanning it eagerly for any strange craft that looks likely. Let no one imagine for a moment that the object of the powers that be in a theatre enterprise is to keep the young blood back; indeed the first hope of the manager is that one of the

extra young people who walk on and play small parts can understudy—and here comes their chance—but, alas, how few are found of the slightest use! What is the percentage that it is obviously impossible to attempt to mould into anything? A very large one, unfortunately, I know from experience. But given that the beginner has the instinct of acting, and has chosen his profession rightly, it is certain that with hard work he can earn a living, and if he has more than the ordinary aptitude, then he cannot fail to win distinction, for once he has shaken off the ruck around him in the race, he will find that at the distance he has a very limited number of competitors. Don't let anyone discourage him, and don't act anywhere for the sake of acting. At the outset the beginner is bound to make mistakes, but let him do it among those by whom they can be corrected.

And now, before I bring this inadequate answer to a close, let me tender a few words of advice, which perhaps may be of service to the young persons who are getting a living, and we hope ultimately distinction. Never listen to praise of any kind whatever, unless it comes—and then it will come in a sensible and dignified form—from someone by whose judgment you set great store. Never allow yourself to develop an eagerness for reading Press criticism; one bad notice will live in your memory for months, and make you self-conscious at some portion of the play, continually most probably, and not all the good notices will erase the knowledge of it from your mind. If you read them, get to know who it is writes them, and then you will feel that the gentlemen who are criticising you are doing

so with the idea of helping you ; make a point of always buying those particular papers, and hope as you open them that you have pleased those whose judgment you have elected to stand by. But as for reading and taking notice of all that is written about you, why you would be compelled, were you sensitive, either to leave the stage at once or become a candidate for the nearest asylum. Don't, because you happen to have adopted the stage as a profession, become *outré* in your dress and manners. Acting is paid for by the public when they see it on the stage—not off it. Try and be as kind as you possibly can to everyone, and especially those that are not doing as well as you happen to be; and above all, be loyal to those for whom you work.

And lastly, in dealing with a question that is hurled at the stage by the Nonconformist Conscience, and the wilfully bigoted and ignorant non-theatre goer, "What of the theatre's morals?" let them be answered at once by "What of the world's morals?" The condition of the theatre is absolutely that of any other community, and I cannot recall a single instance of the downfall of any young girl because of her connection with the theatre, and I have acted continuously in London for four-and-twenty years. If a girl is flighty and silly that she will be, no matter where she goes; and so, if you are a parent or guardian, have no fears on this score. If trouble ever comes, don't make the theatre the excuse, but be sure that in nearly every case the same would have happened had the playhouse never been entered. And do not jump at hasty conclusions because actresses and I mean actresses, not people who make the theatre a shop window for themselves, and by foolish behaviour

bring discredit on a very large number of women) perhaps go about unchaperoned, and in a more open manner than is usual in society. It is in many cases a necessity that they should do so, and there are comradeships between working men and working women which are nothing more than sincere friendships, born of sympathy and respect, and the pleasure of which can never be known outside the artist's life, and so never understood by those who have not to earn their living under similar circumstances.

If—and I hope only after mature consideration, dear reader—you do elect to become an actor, let me impress on you, Be jealous of your profession, which is a beautiful one, and guard its traditions as a precious thing. I grieve to say there are many actors and actresses at the present time who do not trouble to realise that the actor's art is exactly on the same level with all that is best in the possession of her sister goddesses. They exercise no care in their public behaviour, being quite content to make shows of themselves in the most undignified and reprehensible manner.

These are not the old actors and actresses who are ladies and gentlemen, with a very definite sense as to the fitness of what should and what should not be in connection with their profession, but the youth who joins our ranks encouraged by a certain class of artist, who either through ignorance or bad breeding make themselves a laughing-stock, and hold up to ridicule a large body of earnest, thoughtful men and women, who have watched a calling grow into a great profession, and a garden where at one time there was little sunshine, weeded for a quarter of a century by that patient gardener Henry

Irving, and freed from the tangle of prejudice and misrepresentation which smothered its flowers and grew on its paths. In all walks of life, which have no competitive examination for entry to them, persons of various kinds and conditions make a sort of Tom Tiddler's ground where they think they will—unless they are stopped by those already in possession of the land. It is impossible to prevent a servant girl going "*on the stige and becoming a h'Actress*," but she must not be allowed to behave outrageously when she arrives there. Low comedians, the majority of whom had they not thus labelled themselves would doubtless be popular potmen at Islington, and probably not too popular at that, should also be made to understand that their behaviour at public functions is not to be tolerated for a moment. Ignorance is no plea in law, and the letting loose without a keeper of numberless of this kind is like turning a gang of gutter children into Cartier's shop, leaving them to toss precious stones about, and then plead that they did not know the value. The entertainments at which these people, who ought to be chloroformed out of existence, do their edifying work are charity bazaars, comic (?) football matches, comic sports (?) and comic (?) cricket (which is neither comic nor cricket), and charity *fêtes*, which are quite unnecessary, except for the amusement of a peculiar set of nobodies who live their lives forming themselves into committees, because their lack of theatrical engagements permits them to find time to do so.

Money for theatrical charities is to be obtained quite easily in the place it ought to be obtained, the theatre, and nowhere else. Does the undignified behaviour to

be witnessed at the Botanical Gardens each year come about through the lack of a definite head to our profession since the death of Henry Irving? I see all the best known actors and managers, with only one or two exceptions, look on with mortification at the lack of taste and thought displayed; but no one will raise a voice or a plea for alteration—all they do is to stay away. The shrug of the shoulders or the what's-to-be-done attitude adopted by the so-called leaders of the stage means that they shirk their responsibilities in not combating these entertainments which in charity's name are in reality only an opportunity for the airing of the vanities of veteran *ingénues* that the footlights know but seldom. I say "under the guise of charity," and I mean it. If there were no other way of obtaining money for a really good cause, then the means to an end would not be questioned, but when £3,000 can be picked up any afternoon by a theatrical performance by star artists, to see one's comrades making tomfools of themselves in broad daylight, riding on camels and collecting pennies for Aggie, which I had the pain and mortification of witnessing—to see actors trimming hats and dressing hair—is a thing that makes one's blood boil. Were these functions confined to flower-stalls and such like nothing could be said against them, but these ordinary bazaar-like attractions would not give scope enough to the *matinée* idol who wants to play comic croquet and be on view to a contemptuous Brixton if he only knew it; or the comedian who, after struggling all the year like a sea-trout on a Castleconnel rod to get a laugh on the stage, makes one more desperate effort to attract attention off it—forgetting all the time

that the suburbs are looking at him saying: "Dear me! is that all he does?" Or, if haply they are not looking at him, but are peeping under the hat of the latest picture beauty, only to leave her with: "Oh, my! not half as pretty as we thought!"

One cannot blame some of the pretty young ladies who attend these glorified bean-feasts; their only fault is they have never stopped to think. Neither must one be too hard on the ill-bred simpletons who collect pennies from off an animal who must have had a larger hump than usual that afternoon at the use it was being put to, and it would be unkind to blame those whose one afternoon it is.

But there are many who ought to know better; they are to blame as men of position for making exhibitions of themselves, and just as blameworthy are the many actors whom I have heard holding forth on the subject in private, and only make a silent protest in public. It is the duty of us all to do everything to stop these sports and pastimes, and instead *act* for our charities. Paint our noses red, wear patches in the most comic portions of our bodies—do anything in reason to provoke laughter or applause, but in the theatre—in the theatre—in the theatre—and not cheek by jowl with our audiences in broad daylight.

I have little hope in writing the foregoing that I shall reap anything but a harvest of abuse. For this I don't care a straw. It is everyone's duty to try and raise his profession, and not drag it down; and I say that these open-air indiscretions jam mine deep into the peat bog of vulgarity.

The only answer that can be made to me is that

funds are procured. I reply there are other ways of obtaining them. There is no question that if the Lord Chief Justice of England had an affidavit set to music and sang it in Hyde Park, finishing with a comic dance in his robes, he could raise thousands of pounds for the law charities, but he doesn't do it. Neither does Lord Roberts or Lord Kitchener call out a brigade of Guards and, dressing them up in comic uniforms, make them perform strange evolutions to provoke laughter, and so obtain money for the latest soldiers' home ; but this is precisely what we are doing: being laughed at and not laughed with—which is a very different thing. I do not hope to uproot this poisonous plant, but if the youthful Thespian stops to think he may see eye to eye with me, and refusing to give it water let it wither, please Heaven ! in the coming years.

For the young actor or actress I could write a bookful of *Don'ts*. I append a few, which may be digested with ease and do great good if swallowed slowly :—

Don't listen to kind friends. I can show you a cemetery with a mile-and-a-half of tombstones, the inscriptions on which read : "Died of starvation through taking the advice of his brother actors."

Don't go to the theatre and lean out of a box and make yourself conspicuous so that the audience won't notice you are there.

Don't go in for tuft-hunting. If you have got sporting instincts, rather than do this it is better to buy a revolver and shoot yourself.

Don't get photographed more than twice a day, and for choice, not driving a motor-car, or people will know you are out of an engagement.

Don't go to a first night and hiss and clap at the same time; even an author may have friends.

Don't grasp your rival warmly by the hand, and, with a clenched smile, say, "I'm afraid you have got a success."

Don't send wreaths to the funerals of all those who advertise they are dead, or you may be mistaken for a market gardener.

Don't, if you become a manager, advertise "enormous success" and "last nights" in the same newspaper.

Don't think you played to a bad *matinée* at Brighton because there was a diver on the pier. He is always there.

Don't stare too much at the audience; sometimes they are not there.

Don't tell people you are a good actor. Those who think so don't want to hear it, and those who don't think so won't believe you.

Don't forget it's better to have cut your hair than never to have played a part.

Don't forget that no one cares twopence-halfpenny where you are playing, what you are doing, or what you hope to do.

Don't forget it is quite possible to be very nearly human, even if you are successful.

Don't lose your jewels more than once a year.

Don't insure your salary against illness and then go out of the bill and play golf; it makes it hard for those who really need the money.

Don't forget that although you are an actress it is quite unnecessary to put on clothes that make you look like an overcrowded dressing-table, or a cross between a meat safe and a Bond Street show-case.

Don't forget the old army order of "Pass friend, all's well" originated in our profession, and is now the answer to the countersign of the deadhead.

Don't, in speaking of your old Oxford days, forget to say 'Varsity, as there is a circus of that name. And

Don't under any circumstances be tempted to write reminiscences, or forget that if you produce musical comedy most probably all you will get in London is kudos—a word from the ancient Greek which means *no money*.

CHAPTER XXII

CURTAIN

DURING our three years at the Aldwych Theatre we produced only three plays—"Bluebell," "The Beauty of Bath," and "The Gay Gordons"—and as these long runs kept me occupied day and night I thought I might get a little recreation in the building of two theatres in Shaftesbury Avenue, and this I did, becoming part of a combination of gentlemen who erected the Hicks Theatre and the Queen's. Mr. Sprague was the architect, and built them very much on the same lines as the Aldwych, although they were not quite so large. My wife and I opened the Hicks Theatre with "The Beauty of Bath," which was transferred from the Aldwych towards the end of its first year's run. We finished the London season there with it and then fulfilled our provincial engagements with that piece, returning to London to produce "The Gay Gordons" at the Aldwych in the following autumn. All these productions are of too recent a date to write about, and except that a very large number of the ladies under engagement to me left to get married about this time, I do not think there is much to tell. The most prominent among these happy young people were Miss Katie Davis, that golden-voiced little girl who married Mr. Basil Loder; Miss Sylvia Storey left me, having become the Countess Poulett; Miss Camille Clifford, the original Gibson Girl, had

married the heir to Lord Aberdare; Miss Carrington had become Lady de Clifford. A great loss to our little band was Miss Maudi Darrell, who set London singing "By the side of the Zuyder Zee," and who danced and acted herself into the hearts of our audiences in many of our productions. She too has forsaken the stage, and, as Mrs. Ian Bullough, sits in the seats with the aforementioned, and many others who acted with me, applauding from where they were once applauded.

The name of the Hicks Theatre was afterwards altered to that of the Globe, as my plans at the end of my happy eight years with Charles Frohman shaped themselves less in one groove, and I felt for the sake of having my name over a theatre that it would be unwise to tie myself down to appear there for a long period. Charles Frohman one day told a cabman to go to the Hicks Theatre, and the driver went straight to the Coliseum, where I had been playing for a long time. Strangers used to go up to the Hicks Theatre and want to book seats for "Scrooge," which I was playing at the Coliseum. So we felt it best all round to alter the name of the house, and this we accordingly did. In partnership with Charles Frohman I produced there quite recently "The Dashing Little Duke," a musical version of "A Court Scandal," which I had played in years before. My wife played the Duc de Richelieu this time most beautifully, giving one of the daintiest and sweetest performances I have ever seen in my life, and carried the play on her shoulders with a dash and spirit that was irresistible. The actual production of this piece was by far the most artistic and lavish thing I ever attempted. It was played in London and the

provinces for a year. The music was by Frank E. Tours and was quite the most melodious and ear-haunting that this talented composer has yet given us. Since then both my wife and myself have arranged to spend six months in the theatres and six months in the music-halls. Time was when this would have been considered *infra dig.*, but, as the man in *Punch* remarked, everybody of note in the theatrical profession has found out that it is not *infra dig.* But it is "in for a penny in for a pound." I have always held, and I think rightly, that so long as you do your work to the best of your ability it does not matter where you do it. A very large number of my own profession shook their heads and predicted the end of all things for us the day we elected to make a certainty of things for six months in every year. But happily I was right and they were wrong, and they have all very wisely followed, with few exceptions, and in another season if, and only if, these exceptions are still attractive they will till the new pastures, whose first crops, however, they will have missed. The days of running big musical theatres with one's own money in the hope of ultimately collecting enough bank-notes to retire on are all over. Indeed, the odds against any sort of play succeeding are five to one, and when you do have an ordinary success there are so many expenses to be written off, such as people on salary walking about during the time the house is closed redecorating, Lent, the summer, a bad season, or a national calamity, that the people who are able to retire well off are extremely few and far between. Thirty years ago it was a very different caper. Had we continued running big entertainments it would only have

ended as all these things end—a process of exhaustion, which would have left us where we started, or at any rate with not enough to go out to grass in our own field when the time arrived. But now, thank Heaven! by dividing our time in the two forms of work we are able to take off our hats with a modest competence and shall not, I hope, have to lag superfluous in the later years, having the seal of failure set on us by a benefit *matinée*.

The London music-halls are the greatest pleasure to appear in. The audiences are of the very smartest and the house is always crammed full. I would rather play a powerful character part like Scrooge at the Coliseum than at any theatre I have ever acted in in my life. The talent about one is extraordinary on the halls, and one is amazed where it all comes from. The public ought to be deeply indebted to Mr. Oswald Stoll for the way he has cleansed a class of entertainment that at one time was very much in the hands of the red-nosed comedian with little or no discrimination. Indeed, it is obvious that the public do appreciate the charming and refined programmes provided by the far-seeing partner of the astute Sir Edward Moss, for their houses are always full and at the *matinées* throughout England children are to be seen at all their places of entertainment, which in itself is tribute enough to the new order of things. When clean and artistic performances come in at the window the public rush in at the door, and I play with the greatest pleasure and delight at the splendidly-managed houses under the control of these courteous and considerate gentlemen. I have made many staunch friends among my new comrades, and

the invariable kindness and help I have received from artists who might not have unreasonably resented me as an intruder has placed me in the debt of this big-hearted and generous community.

The autumn of 1910 has come, and I have just completed my first twenty-four years on the stage, and with a heart lighter and younger, and with experience in my knapsack, I am starting out on another similar jaunt. I leave behind me in my winter quarters the record of hundreds of parts, let me hope some few of which were adequately rendered, and also of thirty-three plays, written by myself or in collaboration, the most successful of which were "One of the Best," "A Runaway Girl," "The Catch of the Season," "The Earl and the Girl," "Bluebell in Fairyland," "The Beauty of Bath," "The Gay Gordons," "Sporting Life," "Under the Clock," "The New Sub," "You and I," "The Little Duke," etc., etc., etc. If, when I have started on my journey, anyone who has worked for me in my profession cares to go to my little hut where these records are stored, they will find the key in its door. They can turn it, and stepping inside hey will find against their names a word of grateful thanks; and also the key will not be found to have been turned for nothing by many outside my calling, who have done a thousand things for me. Friends like Dr. Milson Rees, who has helped so many of my brother and sister artists, and Arthur Evans, the surgeon whose brains have ever been at the disposal of our poor ones; Frank Boyd, the genial editor who gave me my first good notice; oh, dear! and bless me! hundreds and hundreds whose names if I do not set

down is only through lack of space. My publishers have cried Enough, and here I will write full stop. The ink at my elbow is running as dry as my humour. A gnat has flown across the landscape—I have had the temerity to chronicle the buzzing of its wings.

I hope I have not altogether wasted your time and have given you fair value for your silver coin.

I cannot say good-bye, for I am like the poor relation who makes two visits of six months each in every year. I am still with you, and we shall be probably meeting in the flesh to-morrow. If I have offended anyone in these pages I ask to be forgiven. I have not intentionally set down a single word in malice. All I have said as fact—actually happened to me; and in relating events, I did so venturing to think they might while away an odd hour. If these few pages have lost me no friends, and have perhaps made those who are my enemies think a little more kindly of me, I shall be amply repaid. Thirty-nine is not a great age, but the man who has to write it on his insurance papers, and has not discovered that he wishes those he has wronged to forgive him, and those with whom he has quarrelled to forget, is surely lacking in something. Success is good, money is necessary; but the happy man is he who feels gently towards a world that holds for him no angry face and who is conscious of the value of his little happinesses, however humble they may be. For myself, I have a thousand things to be grateful for. I have had a hard-working life, but that is what a man should have; I have been hungry, and poor, and there is hardly a branch of my profession that I have not worked in—this is also as it should be—and I am

deeply grateful to the many who have helped me to build my little mud pie, and who may not have been thanked enough in the helping. At your feet, my reader, I lay the respectful thanks of a willing though, alas! very imperfect servant, for it is through your great kindness and consideration that I have been able to watch my little girl grow up and those who are dear to me live in comfort and happiness.

Thirty-nine! With the blotting of these pages I feel I have finished an apprenticeship in a firm to whom I articled myself in the hope of learning the rudiments of my profession. Perhaps in the coming years my work will be better and more pleasing, though it certainly could not be more sincere.

I hope it will be many a day before I think of sitting down to write another volume to keep this one company, for if I do so it will mean that I have ceased to work for you, and that the time will not be far distant when Seymour Hicks will not be by himself, but quite alone.

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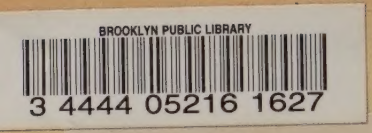

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